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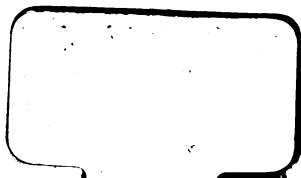
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THE HAMMONDS OF HOLYCROSS.

VOL. II.

THE HAMMONDS OF HOLYCROSS.

BY

LADY BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF

“MY STEP-FATHER'S HOME,”

Etc.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE HAMMONDS OF HOLYCROSS.

CHAPTER I.



THE mile which lay between the residence of Mr. Forster and Holycross House was traversed nearly in silence by the two gentlemen. Gabriel had already told all he knew respecting his brother's illness, and the sense of it lay too heavily on his heart to permit of any indifferent conversation.

Mr. Forster's thoughts, meanwhile, ran over a list of possible responsibilities which

were likely to devolve upon himself during the indefinite period of his friend's indisposition.

On arriving at the house, Gabriel proceeded in silence to admit Mr. Forster, and then glided on a little in advance of him to a door at the further end of the cold, spacious hall. That was the entrance to Michael Hammond's own room, or the study as it was called. His bed-chamber was through it, opening into the sitting-room; but another door in the sleeping apartment communicated with a passage that led directly to the offices. Within this latter chamber was a small iron closet embedded in the thick wall, and dimly lighted by a glazed grating in the solid masonry; and as this iron chest or closet contained all Michael's most important

papers, it was no doubt the reason which made him select that room as his bed-chamber, although it was on the ground floor.

When Mr. Forster and his companion entered the sitting-room they found Michael cowering over a large fire, looking extremely ill, and apparently receiving little warmth from the blazing fuel before him. Mrs. Palmer, with ostentatious assiduity, was flitting about the room, placing his slippers and dressing-gown within reach of the sick man, and then devoting herself to the preparation of some mulled wine which was simmering over the fire. Her attentions appeared rather oppressive to the object of them, though he seemed too really ill to be able entirely to resist them.

On Mr. Forster's entrance, he glanced up at him with a look of relief, and said shortly—

“There! that will do, Mrs. Palmer; thank you. Now, will you go and leave Forster and me alone for a short time?”

“Oh! certainly,” replied Mrs. Palmer, bridling, “but you really are not fit to sit up, or to be left by yourself, after that attack of giddiness.”

“Well, well, never mind—Forster will pick me up if I fall down—now *will* you go, Mrs. Palmer?”

Then, as she reached the door with something of an offended jerk in her manner and gait, Michael called to her with an effort—

“It is only some business I must settle before I go to bed. You can come again

in a quarter of an hour if you have anything more to say—I shan't be longer—come back, if you like, then.”

“Very well,” was all the response made by his sister; but it was in a mollified tone, which showed she fully intended to return at the appointed time.

“Now, then,” said Michael, as soon as the door closed upon her, “before I get worse, there are a few things I must say to you. I am going to be very ill, Forster. Oh! I don't mean I am going to die—not so bad as that, I hope; but I feel—as people sometimes say—I shall be a good deal worse before I am better, and you must look after many things during that time. Now, Gabriel, you may follow Mrs. Palmer.”

“Certainly, brother—I was just going—

I only wished to know if you had sent for Dr. Davis in my absence."

"I don't know; but you can send Matthews for him, if you like; I must see somebody, I suppose."

Gabriel then withdrew, and left the two partners to the discussion of such arrangements as Michael thought needful to suggest in the present emergency. No one opposed his doing so, however unfit for business, for all felt his mind would be easier afterwards, and thus give a better chance for other prescriptions having salutary effect on the body.

Soon after the allotted time, Mrs. Palmer again presented herself, cautiously advancing, and glancing inquisitively towards her brother and his companion, to see how they might be occupied.

Michael was leaning back in his chair, with half-closed eyes, but still speaking slowly and at intervals to Mr. Forster, who sat with a pencil in his hand, making a few memorandums, and referring to a small bundle of papers tied up that lay on the table.

“That’s all,” said Michael, as Mrs. Palmer entered; “I shall be up and about, I hope, by the time further instructions may be required. Don’t bother yourself with that list of names I gave you—either of the young men here will write it out for you in a minute before you go. Is Gabriel in the house, Mrs. Palmer?”

“I really can’t tell,” replied the lady, stiffly; “he has not been near me, at all events; but now I think of it, I did hear him go up stairs to his rooms, and I know

this is about the time he always attends to his birds."

"His birds! pooh!" exclaimed the rich man, with an accent of contempt that gave him sudden energy, "I wish he would attend to something more profitable, then! And Stephen, where is he?"

"I know *he* is at home," said Mrs. Palmer, eagerly, "for he has been making notes on those papers you gave him to look over last night, and said he should not go out till he had completed them. Do you wish me to call him?"

"Yes, let him come—Stephen's the man, when there is anything to be done, as you will find, Forster."

"Ah! and my friend Gabriel is never very far off when he is really wanted," replied the gentleman addressed.

"Well, make haste, if I am to see any one else," said Michael, faintly, looking and feeling more and more unfit for exertion.

Stephen was, however, in the room in a moment—received a few instructions from his uncle, and promptly undertook to do what was required, and was retiring when Gabriel knocked for admittance, bringing Dr. Davis with him, having himself been to fetch him.

The room was then cleared, and Michael and his physician were left alone.

CHAPTER II.



N ten days from that time, Michael Hammond lay at the point of death. His illness increased, and in proportion to his former strength so did the disease gain ground. There was a hard struggle between the powers of resistance and the determination of the malady, which pressed hard upon the citadel of life, and every muscle and nerve seemed prostrated by the violence of the attack. The door of Holycross House was thronged with daily inquirers,

and everywhere the state of Mr. Hammond excited the most lively interest, with a feeling of general sympathy throughout the town that had known him so long and respected him so sincerely. Within the mansion itself, it may be supposed how various were the feelings produced by his condition! In Gabriel's heart there was the one deep sentiment of mournful, absorbing anxiety, apart from the admixture of any other thought, except the earnest desire to be permitted himself to tend and watch over the brother so dear to him. This very natural wish, however, Mrs. Palmer opposed, with a steadfast determination worthy of a better purpose.

There was, however, but little for either to do. A nurse was selected and hired by Dr. Davis, who, with another medical man,

visited their patient daily, and gave all their instructions to this woman, who was the responsible and managing person in the sick-room, having an attendant under her. This arrangement was made by the order of Michael himself at the commencement of his illness, to avoid all worry and interference in the nursing department. It was wisely done, and Mrs. Palmer's fidgets to and fro were greatly modified in consequence. In the meanwhile she and Stephen had many an anxious conference, touching the issue of Michael Hammond's illness.

"If my uncle dies without a will," said he, one day, to his mother, "of course Gabriel will inherit everything as heir-at-law, and you and I, mother, may look out for ourselves, and shall have to leave this house—he will marry quickly enough then."

"Your uncle is sure to have made a will," said Mrs. Palmer; "he is not the man to have put off such a momentous affair to the last moment—don't alarm yourself about that; depend upon it he has made his will, and lately too, no doubt."

"Ay, then the question is, *how* has he made it?—eh, mother?"

"Yes, that is the question that I would give worlds to be able to answer satisfactorily," replied the mother.

"What is your opinion, mother, on the subject?"

"I hardly know—so much depends upon *when* this will was made. Of late he has not been satisfied with Gabriel."

"And did not you tell me that of late there has been a very general feeling about his incompetency, and all that?"

"Yes, and Michael's last observation to Mr. Forster would tend to confirm the existence of that feeling."

"I know—you told me at the time; but my own opinion is, he has a strong prejudice still in favour of Gabriel. Poor fellow! I really think such a weight of wealth and responsibility would be quite too much for his weak mind."

"So do I."

"I fear our opinions, however, won't have much to do with the upshot of the business, if my uncle dies. If he lives, the case would be different; he might, in time, be brought to see things as we do."

"I fear," said Mrs. Palmer, with a sisterly sigh, "the chances of life are much against him now. Dr. Davis said a crisis

was at hand, but he could not give us much hope."

"If I could but see this last Will and Testament," said Stephen. "Have you any idea where he keeps it?"

"I have no doubt," replied his mother, "but that it is put away, with all his most important papers, in the strong closet in his sleeping room."

"What a pity that closet is not in the sitting-room! we might get a peep into it."

"I don't think," said Mrs. Palmer, "that could be done as easily as you suppose. In the first place, this chest or closet is fastened with six bolts, all opened and shut with one peculiar key."

"Well, where is this key?"

"I was going to explain it to you. I know that Michael keeps this key in that

large heavy old oak bureau—in his bedroom also—and that it is hid up in some private drawer known only to himself; and then this bureau again is kept securely locked, and that key I also know is amongst those he always carries about his person.”

“And where are those keys now? He can’t have them in custody at present.”

“I am sorry to say though he has, I find, for I particularly observed it, that during all his illness those keys have been constantly placed under his pillow; the nurse told me it was by his particular order, and she was desired to keep them there, let him be ever so ill, and on no account to remove them.”

“She ought to be a trustworthy person,” said Stephen.

“The keys are nothing to her—she could

not make use of them; she knows nothing about the private drawer in the bureau, and couldn't open it if she did."

"Could *you*, mother?"

"I think I could. Your father had a similar one, and he showed me the secret; it is simple enough to the initiated, but perfectly impossible to be discovered by those who are not. I think—I believe—the two bureaus were constructed on the same plan; in that case, had I the *opportunity*—and there lies the difficulty—I have no doubt we could soon ascertain the harmless point we desire to know."

"We must *make* an opportunity, then," replied Stephen, coolly; and after a pause he added, "This nurse, I suppose, won't give up her place to you for a night?"

"She never has done so yet—she is very

obstinate about always being with him at nights."

"She must have some sleep, I suppose," argued Stephen.

"Very little, and I could never count upon her absence, or Gabriel's not coming to pry about in the day. She sleeps at night, I suppose, in the sick-room, as she is never long away at other times, and she awakes at the slightest noise, and will never allow any one to come in except the maid who waits upon her at night in the next room."

"How are we ever to get the keys with such a dragon? Well, mother, if a thing is necessary to be done, no doubt the ways and means can be found to do it."

Two or three days after this conversation between the mother and son, Mrs.

Palmer might be seen installed in high state in the nursing chair by her brother's bedside, whilst Stephen kindly sat up, in case he might be wanted, in the adjoining room. The way in which this event came about was simple enough. Mrs. Salmons, the nurse, was, after supper that evening, attacked with illness, and so poorly as to be quite unequal to keep watch that night. The woman, too, who waited on her was also ill, so Mrs. Palmer questioned them severely as to what they had supped on, and also whether they had taken more to drink than was suitable to the occasion. This Mrs. Salmons, who was really a very trustworthy person, indignantly denied; but in the midst of her speech was so overcome with drowsiness, that Mrs. Palmer somewhat sharply desired

the old housekeeper to see her safely to bed and her candle properly extinguished, whilst she should herself undertake the duty the nurse was so incompetent to discharge. She further told the housekeeper, if the other woman recovered first, to come with her about five o'clock, when she would be glad to be relieved.

The unconscious subject of all this manœuvring lay meanwhile in a senseless state. There was little to be done, except to observe the few turns the fever took in its deadly progress, and the night watcher's duties were chiefly comprised in administering a few spoonfuls of a restorative nature, from time to time, as the patient was able to take them.

Gabriel, hearing something of the state of the nurse, immediately volunteered to

keep watch with his sister. But in the same imperative way that Mrs. Palmer always adopted to exclude her younger brother by day, did she now refuse to share her self-imposed task with him. She disguised her feeling, however, by saying—

“No, no, Gabriel, pray go to bed—your health requires it. You would soon be on the sick-list too if we had you sitting up, and the fewer people in the room the better. Stephen will not come in unless I call him; and he, you know, can bear any amount of night work or of any other kind. Good night, pray go to bed.”

Mrs. Palmer's object thus attained, she installed herself in the sick-room, and at twelve o'clock Stephen took possession of

the sitting-room. That hour, both the outer doors were carefully looked at, locked, and bolted within. The bedroom in which Michael Hammond lay was a high, square, but not very spacious apartment. The bed was hung with dark green, heavy moreen curtains, which cast a ghastly reflexion on the drawn, pinched, pallid face that was visible beneath their shade. His eyes were partly unclosed, and the whites visible, giving a peculiarly distressing appearance to the sick man's countenance; both his arms were thrown helplessly on the coverlet, as if in intense weakness; the only symptom of vitality in them was that they now and then plucked vainly at the sheet, whilst his head moved feebly at times with a spasmodic motion.

Mrs. Palmer looked at the helpless form before her, only remarking under her breath, "I must take the keys when I raise his head to give him his cordial. There, hand me the teaspoon."

And as he did so, Mrs. Palmer gently insinuated her arm under his head, at the same time feeling under the pillow for the keys, and holding the liquid to his lips with the other hand. Michael mechanically swallowed the contents of the spoon, whilst his sister treacherously sought and found her prize, and then withdrew her arm with them tightly clenched in her fingers.

"Cleverly done!" exclaimed the worthy nephew, as the unconscious head sank back on the pillow and recommenced its restless movements.

The fireplace was on one side of the room, and the window opposite. The oak bureau exactly faced the bottom of the bed, and by the side of that was the door of the strong closet; on the other, that which led to the offices.

“Now, be quick and cautious!” said Stephen.

His mother nodded, and soon found and fitted the key which opened the lid of the bureau. The looking for and finding the secret drawer was a work of more difficulty, but safely and surely accomplished at last. The large and curious old key was in their hands, and Mrs. Palmer yielded it at once to her son; it fitted perfectly, but moved heavily; it required some power to turn so complicated a piece of machinery; it was done, however,

and the many bolts flew back with a clang. The noise appeared to startle the sick man, for his head jerked forward at the sound, and his parched lips emitted a species of wailing noise.

“Be quiet, and blow out the light!” exclaimed Stephen.

It was done, and neither mother nor son stirred from the place, or spoke for some moments. All was quiet again, whilst Mrs. Palmer stole cautiously round to the bedside to look at her brother and ascertain his state. The investigation seemed to be satisfactory, for there was no speculation in those dull dim eyes, and the head was helplessly thrown back on the pillow.

The candle was relighted and carefully shaded, whilst the two crept back to the

closet door, and compressed themselves within its narrow compass.

“Now, then,” said Stephen, with a forced laugh, “we must be very careful. I have no intention of doing my uncle a penny-worth of harm, but I must, in justice to myself, know something of his intentions.”

The two then proceeded to make their investigations. The closet was fitted up with shelves, filled for the most part with a variety of boxes and cases, some of them containing actual and valuable property. There was much plate, both in gold and silver; there were some few jewels of great worth, and a quantity of foreign specie and rare old coins; but for the most part the cases contained papers relative to property, all and everything belonging to Michael Hammond himself.

“Nothing of a will that I can see,” said Stephen, at last, after carefully lifting and replacing every article as it came within the scope of their observation.

“Stay! what is this long narrow tin case? The very thing, I declare!—the last Will and Testament of Michael Hammond. Now, mother, hold the candle nearer. It would be worth something to be his heir,” continued the young man, looking round with covetous eyes on the treasure of which he had so meanly obtained an inspection. The mother and son lifted the bulky document—it was what they sought, and dated only the preceding year. With breathless eagerness they turned over the cumbrous sheets, and scanned their technical phraseology. At last, in some degree, they began to master their intention, and make out

the purport of the whole. It appeared that Michael willed and bequeathed the whole of his extensive property, of every sort and kind, with his large interest at the bank and elsewhere, all and unreservedly to his brother Gabriel; but should he die unmarried, or fail of heirs to inherit, then the whole was to pass to *Stephen Palmer!*" leaving him meanwhile a sum of ten thousand pounds, and half the sum to his sister Mrs. Palmer. There were other and smaller legacies left, but with the perusal of which the guilty pair did not trouble themselves.

"Well, Stephen," said his mother at last, in a suppressed whisper, "there is still a fine chance for you; he has not been very liberal to me, I must say."

"Never mind, mother, when I inherit

all this (am master of all I survey)," looking round, "you shall help yourself to whatever you please."

"Ah! *when!* There, put the precious parchment back into the box—see, it is only a copy—the actual will is in the lawyer's hands. Hush! hush! what is that noise?—Michael again? No, some one knocking at the door. There, come away; shut the box, and leave it where it stood."

Stephen hastily obeyed his mother's instructions, and they quitted the closet with some alarm and trepidation, extinguishing the light once more as they did so. In darkness they closed the door of the strong closet, and with only a glimmer of firelight restored the key to its intricate place of concealment, carefully closing and locking the bureau. Then, with a sigh of relief,

Mrs. Palmer looked and listened, and lighted her candle; whilst Stephen withdrew noiselessly to his appointed place in the next room, and was soon to all appearance fast asleep.

Mrs. Palmer approached the bed. Her brother's posture had not changed; he lay there as unconsciously listless as before. She quickly replaced the keys she had withdrawn from under his head. She then walked up to the door, where a loud knocking made itself occasionally audible. She placed her lips to the keyhole.

"Who's there?"

The voice of the nurse answered back—
"Me, ma'am. Dear! you must have been sleeping hard never to have heard me, and I knocking all this time—and I fancied I heard a stirring about in the room!"

"Oh, it's you!" said Mrs. Palmer, somewhat stiffly. "I am glad to see you are better and able to get up. Yes, I have been to sleep, and put out the candle, and had some difficulty in relighting it, the fire is so low; and I knocked myself up against the bureau, but my poor brother heard nothing of it all. I never thought it was you making that noise and tapping at the door—I thought it must be the rats and mice."

"Well, it is well I *am* come at last, however," said Mrs. Salmons, as she walked up to the bed-side, and, shading the light she held, looked at her patient. "Dear! dear! but he is restless! Has he been a-going on in that way all this blessed night, ma'am? I'm glad, indeed, I am come to the poor dear gentleman. Here,

ma'am, please hold the candle, while I lift his head and give him the composing drops. What have you given him, ma'am?"

Mrs. Palmer was forced to confess, and the bottle attested it, too, that she had given them but once, imputing her remissness to sleep, and not to the worthy occupation by which she had beguiled the night-watches.

Mrs. Salmons, who could in no way account for her attack of drowsiness the preceding evening, was glad to find Mrs. Palmer could not reproach her any longer with it, having proved herself so indifferent a nurse; they therefore refrained from any mutual recriminations, whilst the rapidly increasing restlessness and excitement of the sick man engrossed all

their attention, and roused their alarm ; and it was not till after Mrs Salmons had with difficulty administered largely of the composing draught, that Michael became calmer and sank to sleep.

“ Now, ma’am,” said the nurse, cautiously closing the curtain, “ he’ll sleep for some time, and I expect will wake better or worse ; so you had better go and get some rest, and be prepared for anything that may happen. If there is a change for the worse, you shall be let know directly.”

Mrs. Palmer was not sorry to be dismissed ; she was exhausted in mind and body, and hastened to seek the repose and quiet of her own comfortable apartment. She gained it quickly, and was about to close the door, when she saw

Stephen standing by the fireplace. Before she could speak to him, he turned round, and exclaimed in a low tone, with a perturbed countenance—

“Such a piece of ill-luck, mother!—I have lost my scarf pin!”

“Where did you drop it?” she asked, with a horrible suspicion, whilst she guessed the answer.

“In the iron closet, and, I suspect, in the very case where the will is kept! I am sure now, I heard it fall. I caught my handkerchief shutting the tin box in that hurry in the dark; and I heard something then, but never suspected what it was. You must get the keys again, mother, the first opportunity, and find it. You will not want me for that.”

“Was ever anything so unfortunate!”

exclaimed Mrs. Palmer, in an accent of despair. "I can tell you, it will be no such easy matter to get the keys again, except that your poor uncle seems to me at the point of death."

"I trust not," replied the nephew, with selfish fervour.

"And after all," pursued Mrs. Palmer, "to run such a risk for next to nothing! You are neither the better nor the worse for anything we have seen and done to-night."

"Yes, I am," replied Stephen; "I know where I am, and how I am situated—it is a great point gained. I have two chances, if my uncle lives; and if he dies, but one—that of Gabriel following his example. In the first case, we may both live, mother, to see Michael Ham-

mond make a very different distribution of his property; and to *that* chance, the furtherance of his recovery, we must both of us devote all our attention. I am sure it will be far better for everyone, and for Gabriel quite as much as the rest of us. Now, pray manage to look for my missing pin as soon as possible, as, if my uncle finds it there, it would tell strange tales."

"I will see what I can do," said his mother; "but no one can tell what this night may bring forth. I fully expect to be summoned to your uncle's death-bed before morning; and after so much worry and excitement, I require a little rest previously. So good night," and the mother and son separated for the night.

CHAPTER III.



THE following day verified the nurse's prediction ; and Mr. Hammond, after a deep sleep, which lasted till the afternoon was far advanced, awoke to consciousness, and with every symptom of the crisis having passed, and the pleasant prospect of returning health and strength. We need not dwell on the progress of that recovery—it was sure, and to a certain extent rapid. All the members of his household, in their various ways, rejoiced ; but deepest,

sincerest, and most unselfish of all, was the joy felt by Gabriel on the occasion. Still, with wicked persistency, did Mrs. Palmer oppose all demonstration of such feeling, in allowing him to cheer the lonely hours of the invalid in those days of his convalescence which preceded perfect restoration, and when, from remaining debility, he was confined to his own room.

“Take my advice, Gabriel,” she would say, when she often met him near, and prevented his entrance to Michael’s apartments—“I know that constant running in and out worries my brother in his weak state; he requires perfect repose now—I sit there and don’t speak to him, and that is what he likes.”

“I am perfectly willing to hold my tongue

also, Sybil," Gabriel would reply; "you know such a task is easier to me than talking."

"Well, then," rather impatiently, "I know Michael would prefer your attending to your affairs at the bank. instead of idling all day in his room; he thinks, indeed, you are naturally too much inclined that way; so my advice to you is, to give him the satisfaction of feeling you are in some measure filling his place for him."

"If you think so, I will go," would poor Gabriel reply; and then the wily woman would return with twofold satisfaction to her task of endeavouring to amuse the invalid with cheerful talk, and those little details of local interest which she knew would please and gratify him to hear.

Mrs. Salmons was dismissed, and Mrs.

Palmer reigned in her stead; for, as Michael observed, he no longer needed a nurse, but a companion, to attend to him.

“When I am really ill,” said he, “I like a person whose business and profession it is to attend upon the sick; then everything is sure to be done systematically and properly—it is their calling, and they know what to do, and there is no nonsense or fuss of feelings about them; it is simply a matter of business, and it makes me feel comfortable. But I hate amateur nursing and nurses—they give you wrong medicines, and at wrong times; they make you swallow an embrocation, and rub you with a draught; they fall asleep when you are at your last gasp; and when you are inclined in your turn to slumber, are sure to carry on an

animated conversation in a loud whisper, that is more annoying than speaking through a trumpet."

Mrs. Palmer listened to her brother's remarks, and was aware that, as every transaction was regarded by him as a matter of business, it would be waste of words and fine feelings to revert to any inordinate anxiety she had suffered on account of his past state, or claim any peculiar gratitude from him for the services she had wished to render during his illness.

No, he was not to be reached through the medium of sentiment; but she trusted that unremitting attention at this period might, like the constant drop of water, wear the stone, and perchance soften his heart.

Mrs. Palmer had another cause for the watchful guard she kept in and over her brother's room. She had as yet had no opportunity of taking another survey of the iron closet, and securing and removing the tell-tale evidence of her son Stephen's visit there.

She was sometimes in hopes that Michael might wish for some papers or documents from his stronghold wherewith to enliven some of his weary hours, and that she might be commissioned to open the door, or at least requested to attend and assist him in the examination, when she trusted to her dexterity to find and seize the pin unobserved. With crafty management she often tried to lead the conversation to the subject of secret drawers, intricate locks, and everything

connected with the object of her dread and her desire. It was all in vain. Her brother might listen to her, but he made no communications in return. His keys, too, had entirely disappeared, nor had there been the slightest opportunity for taking possession of them again.

Days passed on, and the chances became more and more remote; till they were totally extinguished, and Michael was pronounced convalescent, and took his place again in his own family, whilst Mrs. Palmer's visits to the invalid's chamber ceased at the same time.

She did not wait, however, till that time fully arrived; she had already arranged a plan in her fertile brain, by which to remove all risk of detection from her son, and even to direct her

brother's suspicions in another quarter, should they be ever aroused by any discovery of the missing pin.

In the meantime, she made a passing inquiry of Gabriel, as if casually, concerning the iron closet—whether he had ever seen it, and was acquainted with the manner of gaining access to it.

“Oh! certainly,” replied Gabriel, with perfect openness. “You know probably that Michael makes it the repository of all his treasures and most important papers; he has shown me long ago every thing connected with it, that, as he says, should anything suddenly occur to him, there might be no difficulty in opening it.”

Mrs. Palmer felt considerably ruffled as

well as jealous at the simple statement made by her younger brother ; and even chose to consider that she, as elder sister, had a better right to be made the confidant of all family secrets, as well as entitled to a large, if not a first, share in its possessions. And the knowledge that she and Stephen were to be cut off with the paltry sum named in Michael's will, raised her indignation against him, as well as Gabriel, whom she now chose to regard in the light of a usurper, whom it was her bounden duty to bring down.

It was a very few days after the crisis in Mr. Hammond's illness, and when the prospect of his recovery was fully established, that Mrs. Palmer set off for an early walk into the town. She directed

her steps to a jeweller's shop at some little distance from Holycross House, and requested to see their assortment of pins for gentlemen's scarfs.

The one dropped by her son was of a pattern rather common at that time. It had been her own gift, so she was well acquainted with every peculiarity it might possess. The head of the pin was composed of small turquoises, placed so close as to make an entire ball of the stones. She fortunately found one nearly of the same pattern, and then requested to see another exactly similar, as she said they were to be worn together.

The jeweller replied that he did not happen to have what she required by him, but would get another from London. And, as the design was a favourite one,

he should have no difficulty in matching it.

Mrs. Palmer consented to this, and in two days was in possession of what she required.

It should be mentioned here, that the previous day, after her brother Gabriel had dressed for dinner, and taken off his morning scarf and the plain gold pin he usually wore, Mrs. Palmer ascended to his room ostensibly to ask him some question, and, hearing no one within, entered, and hastily removed his pin, and then, safely depositing it in a secret place in her own room, joined the party below.

This small episode led to another. For a day or two afterwards, Mrs. Palmer, remarking on the untidiness of

Gabriel's handkerchief, begged to present him with a turquoise pin, hoping he would wear it and keep it for her sake.

This present was one of those pins she had bought. Stephen was already in possession of the other, and no one was aware he had ever exchanged it for that he formerly used.

Gabriel was much pleased with his sister's unwonted kindness and generosity, and expressed his thanks so warmly, that any one less cold and cruel in intention than herself might have been touched by it, and deterred from proceeding any further in the prosecution of her deceitful and malicious designs.

"Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte," says the old proverb, and Mrs. Palmer, having made such a decided one

in the wrong direction, found no difficulty in following it up in the same way without remorse.

From that time Gabriel took his sister's present into constant wear, but he had not long rejoiced in its possession, before this also vanished, like a fairy gift fading away. It so happened that just before Mr. Hammond emerged from his sick-room, and took his accustomed place in the family party, Gabriel had the good fortune, as he supposed, accidentally to find his old plain gold pin, the use of which he was glad to resume immediately, observing, at the same time, he should give himself no further trouble concerning the other, as no doubt it would reappear in a similar mysterious manner.

Michael, as has been observed, was

convalescent, and in a short time declared himself as well and as strong as ever; but he was changed. He was much altered by his severe illness, and no doubt felt the remains of it more than he chose to allow, and became in consequence irritable and far more difficult to please than formerly. Where he had been occasionally testy, he was now cross; his firmness degenerated into obstinacy, and he could not bear to look back on the danger through which he had passed. Moreover, he was quite displeased with any one who ventured to say they had not expected him to live through his illness, and he seemed nervously fearful even now, when the peril was past.

As soon as it was possible, Mr. Ham-

mond returned to his accustomed post at the bank, and greatly taxed his returning strength by the uncompromising way in which he set himself to look into every detail of business during the time he was laid up, as well as enter into, with his accustomed minuteness, all the various other affairs which had been pending about the time of his seizure. In pursuance of these investigations, Michael secluded himself for some hours every day in his private sitting-room; and no doubt considered it necessary at that time to look over some of the various deeds deposited in the iron chest; but whatever were his peculiar occupations then, he never alluded to them more than by saying he "had been busy all the morning;" and there was a species of aimless mystery

about most of his proceedings at that particular time.

One day the family had assembled at the luncheon hour, and Michael, with his usual punctuality, joined them. His countenance was clouded, and its expression irritable; his tone sharp and abrupt, as he asked,

“Pray, gentlemen, to whom does this fine pin belong? I think,” looking sharply at Stephen, “I have seen you wear something of the sort?”

“I have one so like it, that I should suppose it to be mine,” returned Stephen, with perfect composure of voice and manner (while his mother found it difficult to preserve her usual demeanour), “but,” he added, feeling for his own, “mine is all safe, is it not?”

"Oh! yes, I see—you are all right—then I suppose you claim it, Gabriel?"

"I am happy to do so," replied Gabriel, quite unsuspectingly; "yes, that is my pin; I am very glad to see it again—it is Sybil's kind gift, and I should have been grieved to have lost it. Where did you find it?"

"Where you did not intend me, I daresay," replied Michael, snappishly. "You seem to have been very busy during my illness. There—there, let's hear no more about it," continued he, in evident ill-humour, but not choosing to define any further the exact place; whilst Gabriel, in perfect innocence, supposed his brother alluded to his late exertions in the way of business, and replied accordingly:

“Yes, I thought it right to look into things a little more than usual, when you were prevented doing so yourself,” and taking up the pin, began quietly to eat his luncheon, merely considering his brother’s discomposure was occasioned by some business which worried him in his present weak state.

Michael, however, was not inclined to be more explicit at that time. He only muttered—

“Looking into things, indeed! I wish people would let my things alone, and not be in such a hurry to put me out of the way entirely.”

Mrs. Palmer, who had sat in an agony of apprehension, now began to breathe more freely; and after an extra glass or two of wine, found her courage revive,

and, with Stephen's help, she managed to turn the current of her brother's thoughts—at all events, of his conversation; and thus the peril she dreaded passed harmlessly over—at least, as far as she and her son were concerned.

It was unfortunate, perhaps, for Gabriel that he was just then so seldom alone with his brother; whilst Mrs. Palmer dexterously managed to turn every little occurrence so as to further her own treacherous plans, and perseveringly endeavoured to produce an unfavourable impression respecting him in Michael's mind.

As if to favour her designs, about that time Lady Linwood and Lillian Grant returned to the Lodge. In the joy of seeing them again, Gabriel for a time

forgot all that had passed between his brother and himself on the subject of his attachment to Lillian; or he chose to consider that the interval of time that had elapsed might have sufficed to change its character into that of the calm, rational friendship which would permit his again seeking her society. He was, at all events, either wilfully blind to the real state of his feelings, or else strangely self-deceived upon the subject.

Upon some pretext or other, every day did Gabriel seek his friends at the Lodge. Each hour that he passed in their society increased his longing desire for a repetition of the enjoyment. And the kindness, and the gentle pleasure with which his coming was always hailed by Lillian, added to the strength of the

enchantment in which every sense was held captive. Gabriel's silence and pre-occupation were duly noted and remarked upon at home by Mrs. Palmer to her elder brother.

"It is perfect infatuation," she would say. "There is nothing now, and no one, he cares for the least in the world, but those people at the Lodge. It is quite distressing to see how foolish he makes himself about them—he is always there, and neglects every person and everything for them. I really have no patience with him, when he might be so useful to you after your illness. I wonder what he can be thinking of?"

"You need not wonder much, I think," returned her brother; "Gabriel does it all with his eyes open; he knows my

opinion, too—I gave it him pretty freely the only time the subject was named between us.”

“And to think of *your* wishes having no weight with him! It is really very sad, and, I must say, ungrateful of Gabriel, who owes everything to you.”

“I have lived too long to expect much gratitude in this world,” replied Michael morosely; “young men will go their own way, without caring much what their elders may think or say.”

“But surely Gabriel would never marry against your advice?” said Mrs. Palmer, who devoutly wished and hoped he might.

“He is on the high road to do it, at all events, it seems, from what you tell me,” said Michael.

“Indeed, yes, I fear he is. And Lady Linwood seems to encourage it, too; and Miss Grant, I suppose, thinks it may not be a bad speculation for her, for no one else seems forthcoming. I hear that flirt Captain Linwood threw her over entirely, after all his attentions which they talked about at St. Leonards.”

“Pooh! pooh! she’s just as likely to have thrown him over. She expects to get a lot of money, no doubt, with Gabriel; and perhaps she likes him, too—there is no reason why she should not,” said Michael, with less reserve than he usually showed in speaking of his brother’s future prospects.

“Then,” replied Mrs. Palmer, with virtuous indignation, “she richly deserves to be disappointed. But she must have heard

something of the sort from Gabriel, I suppose," she continued emulating her brother's openness. "He may have taken some such idea into his head of late. He naturally, perhaps, began to feel his importance at the time of your dangerous illness."

"Humph!" ejaculated Michael, with a very discontented expression, "I suspect that he did get a little more insight into my affairs than might be good for him just at that time. Gabriel's a good boy, though, on the whole," said he, relenting a little as the thought of his younger brother's blameless life and unchanging devotion to himself came across his mind. "He meant well, no doubt; it's not in him to do a mean, dishonourable action. I would not believe it of him, though

just now he is making a fool of himself. He's not the first man, young or old, that has done so. There! there! there's no good in talking about it—it won't mend the matter."

"But you might give him a hint," said Mrs. Palmer, bridling with resentment at the turn her brother's thoughts had just taken, and his softening towards Gabriel.

"No, no—no hints for me. Speak out plainly, if you do speak, or don't speak at all," returned her brother.

And there the subject dropped.

But though Michael's better feelings struggled in behalf of his brother, his sister's wily insinuations sunk by degrees into his mind. There was at the same time a peculiar feeling of soreness in re-

gard to the discovery made of Gabriel's missing pin in his secret repository.

He vaguely expected for some time that Gabriel, naturally so candid and honest, would offer some explanation of the unpleasant incident, but nothing was said. Nor did the supposed culprit ever seem aware of his brother's discovery or ground of suspicion in relation to the circumstance. Michael, therefore, began to regard the whole affair with more decided aversion than ever, and, somehow, allowed himself to entertain an odious supposition—how originating he was unable to define, but suggesting that his brother had eagerly seized that opportunity of ascertaining with certainty the real state of his future position, so as to prosecute his suit with Miss Grant with better chance of success. Yet Michael

shrank from bringing such a charge openly against him ; and often even doubted in himself the truth of it, and wearied and perplexed his mind with the contradictory feelings that alternately possessed it, causing him rather to shun than seek his brother's confidence.

Mrs. Palmer was also equally anxious to prevent any full understanding between her brothers, and sought to increase the distance and coolness which was unfortunately springing up between them ; whilst Gabriel, blind and deaf to everything, except what was going on at the Lodge, by his apathy at home, and frequent absences from it, added to the evil by giving fresh cause for remark and misrepresentation. In the rare intervals, however, when Michael's kindlier sentiments

towards his brother predominated, he was inclined to take a far more lenient view of the whole matter. He then imagined that Gabriel, to whom the secret fastening of the iron closet was alone known, had on some business emergency, during his illness, considered it necessary to look there for some missing document, and had probably opened the box containing the will, unaware of its contents ; but even in that case, that he should afterwards have ignored or forgotten the whole transaction, which he considered so important, excited both his surprise and indignation.

CHAPTER IV.



WHILST affairs proceeded thus at Holycross, the winter was not a particularly gay or eventful one to the young heiress in Wimpole Street. But with youth, health, and good spirits, Clara Newton never felt much oppressed with dulness or *ennui*, whilst her cousin Fanny's constant cheerfulness was proof against any depressing influence within and without at that dreary season.

Mrs. Morris, on her part, proceeded

with quiet selfishness on the even tenor of her way, not allowing the dreaded duty of chaperoning her niece to interfere with any of her accustomed ways. She made no extra exertion in Clara's favour herself, nor did she choose to devolve upon any one else the office of taking her out, and introducing her to more lively parties, and amusements, than those she habitually frequented.

Many, however, were the offers of chaperonage made—especially by mothers with sons—to and for Clara Newton. She was, however, compelled to decline them all, and content herself with the very moderate portion of gaiety meted out to her by her unsympathizing aunt.

“ Whilst Clara's under my care she

must be content to do as I do," said Mrs. Morris one day to Fanny, after having directed her to write the refusal of an invitation for her niece. "If I once gave in to this sort of thing, and let Clara set up a separate set of friends and goings out and comings in, I could never call my house my own, or have a moment's peace and quietness. It is bad enough as it is—and then girls never think of any one but themselves."

"I think Clara is very easily pleased," said Fanny.

"Well, she has plenty to please and amuse her, I am sure. She has everything that I have—and what more can she want?"

"I think she would just like to go to this one ball, with Mrs. Duncan," replied

Fanny, pleadingly, looking at the note she had been ordered to write.

"I daresay she would, and to twenty more besides that; let her go to *just that one*, as you call it, and there would be no end of it after that. I am sure I hope by the time she is one-and-twenty she will be quietly and respectably married, and an end to all this perpetual worry and bother about going and not going to this place and that."

"If Clara went out more, she would have a better chance of doing as you wish."

"What, marrying!—a nice idea that, to be sending her about to pick up a husband. I am ashamed of you, Fanny Newton, if that is what you want her to go out for."

“Not exactly, Cousin Kitty; but with Clara’s prospects, the more she sees of people the better, before she settles—it would give her the power of choice, at least; she will be taking someone, perhaps, not quite suitable, for want of having seen any one better.”

“Much you can tell about such things, Fanny Newton. I shall manage Clara my way, and not yours. She sees plenty of people. If any one wishes to marry her, let them ask her and me; but I have not heard of any one yet.”

“Oh! there will be, all in good time; and there may be even now. What—what,” said Fanny, hesitating a little, “what do you think of Mr. Stephen Palmer?”

“That he is a very good sort of

young man, and would do for Clara just as well as anybody I know, especially if all I hear is true."

"What do you allude to, Cousin Kitty?"

"Why, there is a talk at Holycross of his uncle, Michael Hammond, making him his heir, instead of Gabriel, who, between ourselves, is rather a bit of a goose."

"Indeed!—I don't think so. If ever there was a good, unpretending man, it is Gabriel Hammond; and he does not want for sense or knowledge either."

"I don't know what it consists in, then—not in making or looking after money, I suspect. I daresay he hardly knows or cares whether he gets five six-pences or four for his half-crown. Michael

Hammond knows better than to leave all his money in such hands. There now! Go and send that note, or we shall have Clara in, bothering about going—girls are so selfish!”

Mrs. Morris considered she was conscientiously performing her duty towards her niece, when she took her to dull dinner-parties, and gave her accustomed number, in return, at home—and to which no young people were ever invited; and sometimes an extraordinary piece of gaiety occurred in the shape of a “*thè dansante*,” or an amateur concert.

It was at one of the last-named assemblies that Mrs. Morris and her niece made the acquaintance of a new character who had lately appeared in the circles in which they moved.

The person in question was a gentleman who was known as the Signor Riccardo ; but who, notwithstanding his foreign-sounding name and appearance, spoke and understood English like a native. He was apparently about thirty, and possessed a fine voice, with some claims to good looks, which, joined to manners of quiet but irresistible assurance, procured him many invitations. The lady who gave the party already mentioned had become acquainted with the signor at a concert where he had performed as an amateur ; and as he was evidently a good musician, she was anxious to secure his unpaid services in the same way at her own party.

By means of his talents and his personal advantages, this Signor Riccardo made his way with great success amongst

Mrs. Morris's set of visiting acquaintance ; and at length had the honour of being introduced to her and her niece. After that event, he became the most respectfully devoted of those who at a distance hovered about the heiress, and with excellent tact paid due homage to the aunt also.

This was done with so much dexterity and success, that although Mrs. Morris always declared she hated foreigners, the fortunate Signor Riccardo at length had the honour of being asked to dine in Wimpole Street ; when Mrs. Morris further extended her invitations to the younger members of the families of the dining guests, asking them to come in the evening, when there would be a little music.

This innovation on her usual habits led

to a good deal of previous consultation with Signor Riccardo, who gladly undertook to play, to sing, to do anything, in fact, that his charming friend Mrs. Morris proposed for him. Clara, with a girl's natural delight, was pleased at something in the way of a home party, which promised more amusement than those she had hitherto been accustomed to.

Mrs. Morris became quite animated on the occasion, and she observed to Fanny, when the signor had taken his leave, after a long conference touching the programme of the performances,

"Well, I must say that signor is as pleasant and gentlemanlike a man as I ever met; and though I make a rule never to encourage foreigners, I am very glad I asked him to come and manage it all for me."

“I think, Cousin Kitty,” replied Fanny, “you will not have occasion to reproach yourself with acting inconsistently in asking this gentleman ; for though he may be of foreign extraction—and I hear he is a Jew—I am told he is an Englishman by birth.”

“Really, Fanny, you seem to know, or fancy you know, a great deal more than other people. Pray what makes you so sure of his family connections?” asked Mrs. Morris, who rather liked the idea of a “signor” presiding at her musical soir  e, and had no wish to deprive her new acquaintance of his foreign honours.

“Well,” replied Fanny, glancing towards Clara, who was seated at the piano in the back drawing-room, practising for the evening, “it was Captain Duncan who told

Clara, the other evening, that Signor Riccardo was supposed to be the son of a Jew who once kept a cigar and tobacco shop somewhere in the City; and this young man, in consequence of his musical talents and his foreign connections (for his mother was an Italian), was sent abroad for his education, and he has since been professionally engaged. His father died lately, and has left him a little—not much—money, and he is doing the best he can for himself upon it.”

“A pack of stories, I daresay! A silly young man tells a silly girl—no one else has heard anything of it.”

“Very likely,” said Fanny; “even if it is not true, or quite true, Captain Duncan might tell Clara something of the kind to put her on her guard, as the signor

seems bent on making himself agreeable to her."

"That's just like you, Fanny—always putting the nonsense out of your own head into Clara's, and thinking every man who says a civil word to her must be in love with her; and she only too ready to fancy it all—girls are so conceited!"

The evening came. It was quite an event in Wimpole Street—a dinner-party, followed by an evening and musical one. The guests assembled to the number of sixteen at the former. The Signor Riccardo made his appearance in such very correct time, neither too early nor too late, that it gave rise to the supposition that he must have hovered about till the exact moment arrived.

On moving into the dining-room, the signor fell back with such becoming humility, allowing every one to precede him, that he succeeded in getting the chance of a seat next to the young lady of the house. Just as he was gracefully advancing to take possession, however, he found that higher honours were destined for him; for Mrs. Morris called him to a place on one side of herself, giving the gentleman who was already in possession the consolation of occupying the vacant seat at the bottom of the table. Whether Clara was mortified or not at this successful stroke on the part of her aunt, did not transpire; but it is certain that, whilst the conversation flowed fluently at the head of the table, she found her elderly companions on either side neither so lively

nor agreeable as the one of whom she had been deprived.

If the dinner party went brilliantly off, thanks to the social efforts of the new guest there, so did the musical reunion derive its greatest charms from the signor's exertions. He sang, he played, he talked, he induced others to exhibit their musical talents, whilst his own were at the command of all who wished to profit by them. In fact, it was a great success, and Mrs. Morris felt an unusual elation of spirits on the occasion. She was sitting apart, listening to a showy piece of music by a gentleman amateur, during the performance of which every one seemed to take the opportunity of talking more than at other times. She listened and admired, and, in the excitement produced by the

lively air which was frequently introduced, Mrs. Morris nodded her head approvingly, and beat time with her fan, when an insinuating voice sounded close to her ear, and it said:

“I have been watching your charming enthusiasm! Ah, why did you never tell me you were so musical?”

“Me musical! Oh, signor, I have not touched the piano, I don’t know for how many years!—not, I am sure, since poor Mr. Morris died; he used to like to hear me play sometimes.”

“Ah!” sighed the signor; adding, with the slightest possible foreign accent, “how touching is the *fidelité* of that recollection and association! But surely your talents—for I recognize them in the movement of your fingers, in the turn of your head—

surely they are not for ever to be buried with the departed?"

"Indeed, signor, I had much rather be played to than play myself. There's my niece now, she gives me music enough—I leave all that sort of thing to her now."

"I see—I comprehend—you retire that she may advance; that young lady is fortunate indeed, but still, dear madame, the world will protest against your hiding your charming accomplishments; do let me induce you to resume your place at the piano."

"Law, signor!" exclaimed Mrs. Morris, quite laughing at the idea, "I should make a pretty figure at it now—I have almost forgotten my notes."

"Then let me have the *félicité* of show-

ing them over again to you! Put yourself under my tuition! I will promise that in a short time you will perform brilliantly again."

"Thank you, signor. But," said Mrs. Morris, doubtfully, "even suppose I were inclined to play a little sometimes, I should have Clara laughing at my beginning again. Girls think nobody ought to learn anything but themselves—they are so self-sufficient!"

"We would bear the laugh, dear madam. Have you not a proverb—*un mot*—'Let those laugh who win.'"

"Well, I'll think about it," said Mrs. Morris, considerably gratified and flattered, and, spreading out her ample skirt as she spoke, and looking with much complacency on its shining folds.

The quick eye of the signor followed her movements, and he exclaimed,

“Ah! what a perfect toilet! How I love to see such exquisite taste in dress—it is a sure sign of a fine mind!”

“I am glad to hear you say so, signor. Many men think it quite foolish and silly in women to like being nicely dressed. Now, I confess, I always did, and always shall like it. So you observe dress, do you, signor?”

“Ah! it is one of my greatest recreations to look at beautiful dresses, and also ” (bowing to Mrs. Morris), “the beautiful ladies in them. I am too much of a *fanatico* in music not to appreciate harmony wherever I find it, and I can discern harmony in colour as well as in sound. I see in the artistic blending of

certain hues evidence of a mind attuned to the sense of all that is beautiful and becoming—do not you? But I need not ask—I see you do.”

Mrs. Morris was luckily spared the exertion of endeavouring to comprehend this speech sufficiently to reply to it, by the music suddenly ceasing, and several conversations stopped at the same time; and soon after this the party broke up.

Mrs. Morris, considerably fatigued by all her exertions, sought her room without delay, and was ere long wrapped in heavy slumbers and rather disturbed dreams in which “signors” and “side dishes,” “satin gowns” and “sonatos” long since played by her, acted their fantastic parts.

As the cousins went up-stairs together,

“Oh! he has been gone to the bank Clara drew Fanny within her door for a moment, saying,

“I won’t keep you up, you look tired, but just one word. Tell me, what do you think of this new man—this Signor Riccardo? He seems to be making quite a sensation amongst us. Did he talk at all to you?”

“To me! Oh! no, he would not throw away his valuable time so unprofitably; but, Clara dear, I will tell you what I think he is. Hush! I will whisper it into your ear.”

Fanny did so. She spoke but two words, and they sounded like “designing adventurer.” But, truly, they made Clara start and exclaim,

“Is that really your opinion?”

Fanny only nodded in reply; and, leaving her cousin to ponder over it, withdrew to her own apartment.

CHAPTER V.



T was a sultry morning in the beginning of July. The market-place at Holycross gleamed white and dry for want of rain. The sun glittered with hot beams on the old stone cross; whilst the ancient house opposite presented a cool and inviting aspect, under the shadow of the tall Lombardy poplars, with their abundant though somewhat dusty foliage.

. It was noon; the index on the dial

of the Town-Hall clock pointed exactly to that hour, when, punctual to its announcement, Mr. Hammond issued from his study-door, and took his hat and stick from their accustomed place in the hall.

Mrs. Palmer happened to be passing through at that moment, and stopped to ask her brother if he was going to the bank.

"For," said she, "you will find the heat rather oppressive this hot morning, I am afraid."

"Humph!" said Michael, "if I stayed at home for a hot day, I might shut myself up for the summer. I am not easily melted; and now Forster's holiday-making, there is a great deal to do. Where is Stephen?"

these two hours. I saw him just before he went there—he looked in to say he was going, and asked me to tell you how hot the morning was. You should remember you are not quite as strong as you were last summer.”

“Tut! tut!” said Michael, testily, “I’m strong enough. And Gabriel, where is he?—gone to the bank?”

“He is gathering flowers,” replied Mrs. Palmer, with a peculiar look, and half glance towards the opposite hall-door, which opened into the garden; “he is close by. Shall I call him to go with you?”

Michael’s eyes followed the direction of his sister’s, and he saw Gabriel standing on the steps which led into the garden from the house. He was employed in

cutting some sprays from a very fine and luxuriant jessamine, which grew against the wall, quite overshadowing the doorway and adjoining windows.

The garden view from that side of the house was extremely pretty, displaying the wide turf glades, fringed with the umbrageous plantations on either side, and sloping down to the broad river at the base. In its cool sequestered shade the scene presented a marked contrast to that on the opposite side of the house, which looked into the dry and arid square, now glaring in the mid-day sun.

Perhaps the personal dissimilitude exhibited between the two brothers, as they each went their different ways, was almost as striking as the natural diversity of the paths they chose, and as suggestive

of the contrast of character between them.

Whilst Michael gazed upon his brother and his occupation, he made a slight gesture of contempt, saying—

“No, no—let him go his own way!” and, opening the opposite door, went across the burning, dusty market-place to the bank, which he preferred to all the flowers and fragrance of that glorious summer morning.

Mrs. Palmer looked for a moment, as she stood in the hall, out of either window, at the retreating figures of both her brothers, as they walked away from the same house in their opposite directions; and as she did so, smiled to herself. But it was not a pleasant smile, nor did it soften the expression of

that habitually hard though handsome face.

Gabriel might indeed have been a changeling, for any likeness he bore in mind or person to his own family or existing relations. His fair abundant hair, delicate though pallid features, and tall, slight, bending figure, were as different from his brother's firm square form and face, with its shrewd, cold expression, as the turn of their minds and dispositions were unlike.

Gabriel on the present occasion, unconscious of the scrutiny he and his occupation had undergone, and forgetful of the bank, as if it had no existence for him, took the flowers he had gathered in his hand, and proceeded with a leisurely step across the lawn, towards the cool shelter of the plantation.

Soon after, emerging from thence, the gate was opened which led from the grounds, and he took his quiet way along the meadow-path by the river side, until it brought him within the precincts of the pleasure-grounds belonging to Linwood Lodge.

Then, with a leisurely and accustomed step, he sauntered up the well-known walk which led to the house, and, with a heart full of happy thoughts, knocked with familiar hand upon the window that opened into the garden.

The voice which said "come in" was very near, and in a moment Gabriel Hammond stood by Lillian Grant.

A marble table was drawn into the deep recess of the bay window, and Lillian was employed, as Gabriel loved to

see her, in filling several flower-glasses and vases with the beautiful blossoms which were thickly strewn upon the table ; some even lay upon the carpet, with Lillian's straw hat, which she had thrown there. Nothing could look prettier or more engaging than she did that morning, in her fresh, cool muslin dress, as she stood, with her supple, slender figure bending over the flowers, whilst she arranged them in the glasses.

"Let me help you," said Gabriel. "I have brought you your jessamine. Can I put some in for you?"

"A thousand thanks!" said Lillian ; "there is no jessamine so fine and sweet as yours. I am glad you brought it just now. There, you shall make up that glass, whilst I arrange this."

Gabriel seemed used to the occupation, and the two were soon engrossed in it, talking meanwhile of the different plants and blossoms which were scattered around them.

Gabriel at last looked round with a sudden gleam of recollection, and asked—

“Where is Lady Linwood?”

“Gone out, I am sorry to say,” answered Lillian. “It is too hot for her to walk, so she has taken the pony. She is gone as far as the Common, to see one of Harriet Forster’s *protégées*. You know they are away now.”

“Yes,” returned Gabriel, with another ray of recollection darting unpleasantly into his mind. “I ought indeed to have remembered it, for I know my brother mentioned it yesterday, and said there

would be more work at the bank, in consequence, for Stephen and me."

"I daresay," said Lillian, laughing, "Stephen is gone, like a good boy, to school, whilst other people come out to play."

"Well, well, it can't be helped now," replied Gabriel, with an answering smile. "Don't send me back to school, please, and I will enjoy my holiday. Yes," continued he, more seriously, "whilst there is happiness so pure, so perfect, to be found on earth, I must taste it now, whatever to-morrow brings."

"Ah! to-morrow," said Lillian; "that reminds me that your old friend and playmate is coming here to-morrow."

"What, Henry Linwood?" replied Gabriel, with no peculiar accent of joy.

"Yes, Aunt Mary was so glad to get one of his hurried notes to say he was coming for a day or two. He never stays longer at a time. He has not been here since Agnes's wedding last August."

"No, I know, but—but he was with you a great deal at St. Leonards, I heard?"

"Yes," replied Lillian, blushing slightly; "but that was very different; he went backwards and forwards to Canterbury—and then at a public place there is so much more to occupy and amuse people."

"They said here," said Gabriel, with an effort, and slowly, "that there was another attraction for him there?"

Lillian answered nothing, but arranged her flowers rather less carefully than usual; her hand trembled a little. Gabriel ob-

served it, and his own shook nervously, as did his voice, when he continued:

“Yes, that was what people said, and your silence says the same. Pray forgive me.”

“What nonsense!” said Lillian, with some excitement. “Please give me some of that jessamine, you are pulling it all to pieces.”

And she held out her hand for it; but that little hand was caught and imprisoned between two very trembling ones, whilst Gabriel with difficulty articulated,

“Is it true? Do speak one word. I am mad, presumptuous to ask it, but it is a matter of life and death to me. Are you engaged to him?”

“Oh! no, and never shall be.”

“Thank God!” replied Gabriel.

And his head fell on his clasped hands with a look of unutterable relief. Then, after a moment, he looked up and met Lillian’s soft eyes fixed on him with such an expression of sweet loving compassion, he could no longer control the impulse that urged him to continue:—

“I must say it, Lillian—you may hate and despise my mad presumption, but I love you better than my worthless life. You are dear to me as my hopes of heaven. Oh! Lillian, you can’t return it, but don’t be angry with me, I ask for no return, but let me love you still, though you never may be mine.”

The little hand Gabriel still held was not withdrawn, and a sweet soft whisper said:

“Indeed, I never could be happy with any one else.”

The words were simple, but they were enough for Gabriel; and who shall attempt to depict the emotion of that warm, loving heart, so fondly attached, and yet so diffident of its own merits—or who could record the words that flowed with the overpowering force of their deep devotion from those faltering lips? It is enough, Gabriel and Lillian were blessed in the certainty of each other's love, and plighted their faith with the tenderest trust in the heart they mutually accepted and bestowed. The time flew unheeded, the flowers drooped in the heat of that summer morning, as they lay beside the cool water intended to receive them. Such unalloyed happiness as Gabriel and Lillian tasted that day comes

but seldom to refresh life's weary way, and few there are who could feel the depth and intensity of it as they did.

Lady Linwood at last returned, and entered the room unperceived by its two engaged occupants ; but as she glanced at the pair, who sat hand in hand within the shadow of the recess, she saw at once that the full heart had spoken, and been accepted—that Lillian was wooed and won !

To say she did not experience a slight feeling of regret as she thought of her stepson would be untrue ; but she was satisfied that the niece, who was as dear to her as her own child, had chosen well, and had every prospect of domestic happiness, as well as worldly prosperity, in becoming the wife of Gabriel Hammond. So the consent he asked so humbly, and Lillian so confidently,

was given in all cheerfulness and contentment.

Can it be wondered at that Gabriel lingered on, with the sense of his newborn joy thrilling in his heart, with Lillian his betrothed?—his own in promise—that all home duties were forgotten—that the bank faded from his recollection, and even his brother's behests were unregarded. After an afternoon of delicious loitering amongst the shrubberies, often sitting in speechless happiness together under the shadowing trees, till the bell for dressing (regardless of love's indifference to times and seasons) rang, reminding Gabriel that *that* was the dinner-hour at Holycross.

“You will stay and dine here, Gabriel,” said Lillian, timidly—“Aunt Mary, I know, will expect you. Oh! never mind about

dressing for 'once — stay as you are."

It is needless to say that Gabriel, thus asked—thus pressed, remained; he dined, and also spent the evening at the Lodge.

In the meantime, the day had proceeded with solemn steps at Holycross House, till it reached the hour of half-past six o'clock, and the family as usual assembled for dinner. Michael looked fagged and wearied; his illness the preceding spring had told even upon his strong wiry constitution, and the feeling of fatigue made him irritable, especially before dinner; he therefore merely looked round the room, and, seeing no Gabriel, rang the bell, and without an inquiry respecting him, proceeded to the dining-room.

Mrs. Palmer, perfectly satisfied with the

course things were taking, did not even allude to Gabriel's absence ; but, seeing her brother's fatigue, abstained from talking to him, and what little conversation there was during the repast was carried on between the mother and son.

Michael, however, made full amends for the testiness of his curt replies when called upon to make any during the course of dinner ; for after the cloth was removed, and the fruit and wine placed on the table, he called to the old servant to bring some of the best claret, which never appeared on ordinary occasions.

"Now, Stephen," said he, "you have worked hard to-day—we shall both be the better for a cool glass of this wine."

"And you, sir," replied Stephen—"if it was not for your wonderful energy of mind,

you would be quite done up this evening. What can have become of Gabriel?—he ought to help you.”

“And he *must* do it,” said Michael, “if he retains his present position.”

Stephen could not restrain a sort of start on hearing these words.

“Well, what is there to astonish?” said his uncle. “It is rather an unfair division of things, that one person is to play all day, whilst the others work. Let them play, by all means—I wish everyone to go their own way—but I can’t be expected to pay as well as work for him. There! there! don’t talk about it! I don’t want your opinion on the subject. You would take his part, no doubt, though you are quite ready to work yourself—there, fill your glass—you deserve some of the

good things of this world as well as Master Gabriel."

After this speech, Michael spoke no more, but taking up the paper, soon fell comfortably asleep over it; whilst Stephen remained wide awake, with a very pleasing sense of impending prosperity—thinking with complacency of the absent Gabriel, who was thus kindly and unconsciously favouring his chances, to the detriment of his own.

Michael frequently breakfasted alone at an early hour in his own sitting-room, and was seldom visible till about noon, when he either went to the bank, or walked in the grounds. The morning after the day just mentioned, Michael sat in his chair by his writing-table; that he was deep in thought was evident, both

from his attitude, and the absence of all actual employment, although the materials for occupation were close at hand. Michael's chin rested in the hollow of his hand, his eyes were fixed on the cornice of the room, his elbow was on the table, and his disengaged hand held some old letters or papers; his thoughts meanwhile ran somewhat thus:

“Yes, he has good abilities enough; his health is quite established now, he has no excuse—foolish fellow—foolish fellow—he gets worse and worse! Everything will go to wreck and ruin when I am gone; not that I am likely to go yet—I am as strong as ever, or nearly so. There's Stephen—ah! he's the man to keep up the credit of a house best! Gabriel used to be a good fellow once,

though!—what is come across him?—he is worse than ever!—he must——”

A rap at the door.

“Come in,” called out Michael, rather startled, as the subject of his soliloquy presented himself

“Brother, if you are not particularly engaged, I want to speak to you.”

“I am always engaged, Gabriel, but come in and speak out. I suppose you want to tell me you are quite sick of the bank, and wish to cut the connexion?”

“No, indeed, brother. Pray forgive my forgetfulness of it and you yesterday. I am sure you will excuse me when I tell you the cause.”

“What now?” exclaimed Michael, sharply.
“What new folly are you about to commit?”

"I hope, brother, you will not consider it one—notwithstanding what has already passed between us on the subject,"—then, with some hesitation and nervousness, Gabriel added—"I was at the Lodge yesterday."

Michael gave a discouraging sort of grunt.

"And—and—I proposed to, and was accepted by Miss Grant."

"Oh! that's it!" replied Michael, with great dissatisfaction in his voice and countenance. "Well, you are old enough to choose for yourself. You know my opinion about such a connexion already; and *I* am not in the habit of changing my mind every time the wind blows in a new quarter. So you can't expect me to give you joy."

“Indeed, brother, but I hope you will approve of my choice. You must like Lillian—you can’t object to her; and it would be a real sorrow to me, in such an important event of my life, not to have your approbation, and full and free consent.”

“Consent!” said Michael, somewhat mollified; “you want no consent at your time of life. I should have been glad if you had chosen a wife more likely to be of use to you than the pretty lady you have just mentioned. I have no objection to Miss Grant, except as your wife. You’ll make a nice mess of your affairs together. Well, it is no business of mine—I have warned you. I hope you will be happy. Well, when is it to come off?”

"Brother," said Gabriel, earnestly, distressed at the tone and manner in which Michael took his announcement, "I am grieved to hear you speak as you do. You have been the best friend in this world to me all the days of my life, and I would not incur your serious displeasure for any gratification of my own that this whole earth could offer. To lose your affection and regard would make every blessing in life tasteless to me; but you will not doom me to forego this? I know you will love Lillian; and we will try to do our best to gain your good opinion as to our capabilities for better management than you give us credit for."

"Humph!" said Michael, in a relenting tone; "you have given me so much

reason of late to approve of your proceedings."

"Pray forgive me!—I know I have been very remiss; but you can make due allowance, I am sure, for the state of mind I have been in. You will find me a much better man of business," he added, smiling, "now my mind is more at ease. Dear brother, only say you will go and see Lillian to-day?"

"You are in a great hurry," said Michael. "I don't promise any such thing. Pray, what does Lady Linwood say?—and what is to become of that fine step-son of hers?"

"She approves—she is now, as ever, the best and kindest of friends to me."

"Humph!—well, and what says my Lady Stapleton?"

Gabriel changed countenance—he had already asked himself the question, with no feeling of certainty as to the answer. He could only reply—

“I do not know—she is still in London.”

After all, this interview between the brothers ended amicably and pleasantly; and was so far of use, that it cleared away many threatening clouds that had long been gathering in the domestic horizon of Holycross House.

CHAPTER VI.



WELL! are not you ashamed to look me in the face, after the letter I had the very little pleasure of receiving from you two days ago?" was the salutation of Lady Stapleton on making her unexpected appearance at the Lodge, a few mornings after Lillian's announcement of her engagement to Gabriel Hammond.

Lillian did indeed feel and express much surprise at seeing her sister, whom she believed to be still in London; but

added, she hoped she had no occasion to feel any shame, on the subject of her letter.

“Then I think very differently from you, Lillian,” replied Agnes hastily; “and I am come down wholly and solely in consequence of the news you sent me, in the faint hope that I may not be too late to persuade you to listen to reason, and to see the step you contemplate in the same light that I do.”

“That is hardly to be expected,” said Lillian, with a blush and a smile.

“Goodness, Lillian!” exclaimed Lady Stapleton, surveying her sister with a perplexed and irritated expression of countenance. “Is it possible that you are really and truly desperately in love with one of the banker angels?—or is it love of money

—or what? I can't imagine it; but perhaps you will tell me *which* of the Messrs. Hammonds is the favoured individual?"

"*Which!*" replied Lillian, with a *naïve* gesture of astonishment. "Oh! Agnes, how can you ask such a question—you know as well as I do—I told you in my letter!"

"I know," said Lady Stapleton, with a half sneer—"Gabriel is the happy man; but Michael and Gabriel is all the same to my untutored ears; both names sound equally angelic to me. I only wish to know whether it is the elder or the younger—the rich or the poor you have chosen?—for truth to say, I have forgotten to which of the gentlemen the respective names belong."

"Gabriel Hammond is much younger than his brother; he is more like a son than a brother to Mr. Hammond," said Lillian, in a gentle, explanatory voice; "and I am sure, Agnes, when you know him, and overcome his first little shyness, you will like him; you know how much Aunt Mary does."

"Then it is worse than I hoped or feared," replied Lady Stapleton, abruptly, and disregarding the latter part of Lillian's speech. "If you were determined to marry a banker, why not have chosen the eldest? I have heard he is very rich, and money will always carry a certain weight and consideration with its possession, and with your connections something might have been done; but now——!"

And Agnes threw up her hands and eyes, and seemed lost in the dismal anticipation of her sister's future prospects.

Lillian, however, with a bright smile, reminded her sister that they had formerly possessed some friends of the same calling of high note in the fashionable world; and although she did not aspire to a similar position, she did not see that Gabriel Hammond's profession as a banker was necessarily to sink her so low as her sister apprehended.

"Ah!" replied Agnes, "the case is quite different—and we will not dispute upon the subject—the people you allude to had connections, to begin with, and money enough to cover any multitude of sins; besides, they were in a totally contrary line of life altogether, as London

bankers *versus* country ones. And your Hammonds," continued she, scornfully, "are essentially mercantile men; the family have always kept in their original position, have never aspired beyond it, and have hitherto married into the same set as they themselves belong to. Alas! that my sister should be the first exception!"

"Never mind, Agnes," said Lillian, cheerfully; "we shall be very happy—for we neither of us wish for anything beyond what we have hitherto enjoyed, and we shall, I hope, retain all our best friends, and find them the same as before."

"I don't know that," said Lady Stapleton. "I fear it will be impossible for me to see as much of Mrs. Gabriel (what a name!) Hammond, as I have done of Lillian Grant. And you who *might* have done

so well! Yes," continued her ladyship, "I know all about Mr. Trevor, though you never told me you had refused him; and then you might have had Henry Linwood any day you chose—and I could help you to something better than either, I have little doubt. Ah! Lillian, don't be headstrong and foolish—do pause, and be persuaded by me. I have come from London on purpose to save you, if you will but listen to me. What possible motive can I have in view but your good?"

"Thank you, Agnes, dear; I know you mean very kindly by me—but, indeed, there is no use in discussing this matter any more, it can only be painful to us both; my word is pledged to Gabriel Hammond, and no earthly consideration shall make me withdraw it."

"What! not if you find you repent your promise. Will he hold you to the performance."

"*He* won't, perhaps," said Lillian, blushing, "but—but—my own heart will!"

Agnes was not, however, so easily defeated in her project of persuading her sister to break off her newly-formed engagement, and the day was spent in fruitless argument and vain persuasion on her part; nor had she better success in attempting to enlist Lady Linwood on her side.

Lady Stapleton was foiled.

"Now, my dear," said Lady Linwood, at the conclusion of their unsatisfactory conference, "as you see the thing is inevitable, I can only hope you will submit with a good grace to seeing your

sister the wife of Gabriel Hammond. I have no doubt of her happiness in becoming so, though, at present, they may not be so rich in this world's goods as you desire to see them; but there is every chance, no doubt, in the course of time, of their succeeding to a fortune and property that may satisfy even your requisitions for Lillian, and give you reason to consider the match a prudent one."

"Ah!" replied Lady Stapleton, who, having taken the matter in hand, chose to carry it out, without caring how little her interference was desired. "Yes, to be sure, that point must be looked to. If Lillian is obstinately bent on this sacrifice, we must see that she gets something substantial in return. I shall get our uncle, Lord Carlton, to come down and

see that proper settlements are made on the occasion."

"I have no doubt Gabriel will be anxious to do everything that is right and liberal, without any prompting from Lillian's family," said Lady Linwood.

"Perhaps so; but the rich brother is the object of my attack," replied Agnes.

"Take care what you attempt in that quarter," said her aunt. "If Mr. Hammond comes forward at all upon his brother's marriage, depend upon it, it will be his own act and deed—he is not a man to be 'attacked,' or *made* to do anything."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself, an old miser!—but we shall see! He must be charmed with the connection, and

will, no doubt, be glad to give good proof of it, particularly if Lord Carlton shows him any civility and attention."

"I fear your uncle's good intentions will not avail much in that respect; but he will be a very proper person to be Lillian's trustee, and I am glad he is desirous of showing her kindness on the present occasion; for neither he nor his family have noticed her much, as you are aware, since the visit you both paid to him after your father's death."

"I know," returned Lady Stapleton, with a slight toss of the head; "but *we* have been on the best terms ever since my marriage, and Lord Carlton will do anything to oblige me."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lady Linwood, quietly; "and I hope now you

mean to stay and dine with us?—you will have the opportunity of becoming acquainted with your future brother-in-law.”

“I am not equal to that at present, I fear,” replied Agnes; “I am quite exhausted by all I have undergone this day, and my fruitless efforts in Lillian’s behalf; and as Sir Arthur will expect me at home, you must excuse me for to-day.”

And Lady Stapleton departed.

Notwithstanding her sister’s expressed disapproval of her intended marriage, Lillian was very happy. She and Agnes had of late led such different lives, and their paths had tended in such opposite directions, that she hardly wondered that they should entertain different opinions on the present occasion.

She was aware that Gabriel Hammond was not a man after her sister's heart—had he been so, the probability is, she would not have liked him so well. Lady Linwood, however, appreciated him, and Lillian was satisfied.

The days of their engagement passed happily and swiftly away. If there was a shadow over the bright future, it must be confessed that it proceeded from the reflection cast by Mrs. Palmer, when she presented herself, to Lillian's imagination, as her future sister and near relation. She consoled herself, however, with thinking that there must be a drawback to everything; and determined to let Mrs. Palmer and her future connection with her be as little as possible of a *bête noir*, either at present or in an-

icipation. That they must have little in common with each other, she was aware, for Lillian's candid nature felt instinctively that with Sybil Palmer she could never be intimate—she entertained a species of mistrust already, that she tried in vain to subdue; but she was Gabriel's sister, and in that light did Lillian strive to consider, and even, if possible, to like her.

On the engagement between her brother Gabriel and Lillian Grant being duly announced to Mrs. Palmer, she chose to dissemble on the occasion, and was not found wanting in all proper manifestation of interest, and even attempted some profession of affection towards her young relation that was to be. She lost no time in paying her visit of congratulation to Lady Linwood and her niece, and claiming

a place in the regard of the latter, declaring she should feel quite a maternal interest in her and her brother, as the disparity between their ages made that sentiment more natural than the sisterly one proper to their real relationship.

On Stephen's part, the absence of all sympathy or of congratulation, either to Gabriel or Lillian, excited little surprise in the minds of either. In fact, both were at that time so self-engrossed, so all in all to each other, that few outward circumstances had power to excite or to annoy—nor did they care to search for shades of feeling or character, as displayed towards them by those around. They were so perfectly happy and contented, that the sunshine of their felicity cast a glow upon all and everything around, and thus the time wore rapidly away.

Stephen remarked one day to his mother, after they had all been dining at the Lodge, shortly before the time appointed for his uncle's marriage—

“Gabriel and his ladye-love seem so entranced in their fool's paradise, that they neither of them observed my uncle Michael's look when Lady Linwood said they expected that precious brother of hers, Alexander Grant, down for the wedding.”

“She is not aware, I suppose,” said his mother, “that we all know everything about him, and the shameful way he fleeced your foolish uncle Gabriel.”

“Everybody might know that,” returned Stephen, “for it was the talk of the whole town; but the money was paid back to Gabriel.”

“Indeed! by whom?”

“I suspect that an old aunt, Mrs. Murray, helped, but I am not quite sure; I only know it has been repaid.”

“Well, I have no doubt Gabriel will soon give it all back again,” remarked Mrs. Palmer; “but if Mr. Alexander Grant *does* chance to appear, as you say, I feel pretty sure your uncle Michael will fight off attending the wedding.”

“He can hardly do that,” said Stephen; “but he was thoroughly put out, I saw. There was that humbug, Lord Carlton, making civil speeches; and to-morrow they are going to talk over the settlements—and I know I wish them all joy of it!”

CHAPTER VII.



GABRIEL HAMMOND lingered one morning in the breakfast-room—where all the family had assembled—after Mrs. Palmer and Stephen had taken their departure from it; he evidently wished to speak to his brother; but Mr. Hammond's whole attention appeared to be given to his newspaper, and so absorbed was he in its contents, that he seemed quite unconscious of Gabriel's presence after the others had left the room.

Michael's temper and frame of mind, for the few preceding weeks, had not been agreeable. Ever since the announcement of Gabriel's engagement to Lillian Grant, and after it became an accepted fact in the family, he had evinced his dislike to it, by becoming more than usually taciturn, with occasional fits of testiness and contrariety at home. He was often absent however, for he attended more assiduously than ever to his various occupations, and seemed to find a solace and recreation in so doing.

At length, after Gabriel had paced up and down the room, drawn up and pulled down the window-blind several times, Michael spoke.

"If you have anything to say to me, can't you speak, and at once, and not

keep up that—that dreadful fidget in the room? Now, then—what is it?”

Gabriel, thus invited and reprimanded, stopped in his walk, and stood on the further side of the table, which separated the two brothers.

Brothers! Who, looking at the two men for the first time, would ever have suspected their relationship! As Michael sat in the arm-chair at the head of the table, with his small, restless grey eyes glancing up at his brother Gabriel's calm but at that moment somewhat anxious face and pale, intellectual features.

“If you are at liberty now, brother, I wanted to talk to you a little—to consult you—to ask your advice.”

“That's rather late to do so,” returned Michael, sarcastically. “When people go

their own way as long as they find it smooth and pleasant, and then come to others to do the rough and disagreeable part for them. Eh?—is that it?”

“Not that I know of, brother. I hope there are no difficulties to surmount—the question is about our future residence—after my marriage, I mean.”

“Ay! that’s it, is it? Well, you have formed some plan or other, I suppose. You have no wish to remain here, at the old house?”

“Oh! no!” replied Gabriel, quickly; too quickly, perhaps, for Michael’s eyes flashed angrily as he interrupted him with,

“Well, well, you need not be in quite such a hurry; you may go further yet, and fare worse. Well, where are you thinking of pitching your tent?”

“Lillian and I have been thinking of buying some little place near the town. She would not like to live in it, and we should prefer buying to renting a house.”

“Of course you would—and she would also, no doubt. Well, what prevents you doing so? You are your own master, and old enough, I presume, to manage your own affairs.”

“My dear brother,” said Gabriel, pained at the tone in which Michael spoke, and speaking, as was his habit, with perfect candour and openness, “do you see any objection to my plan?—are you displeased with my entertaining it? I was aware that on my marriage I must leave the home you have hitherto given me; and that being the case, it was necessary to

look about for another. I have been doing so the last month, and only waited to find something likely to suit me, before I spoke to you about it."

"Well, and what have you found?—Elmswell Park? I hear that is to be let or sold; but no doubt you and the lady prefer the latter arrangement."

Gabriel only smiled quietly at his brother's taunt, as the place in question was one of the finest estates in the neighbourhood, and just put up for sale.

"No; we are not quite so ambitious or so foolish—our views are more moderate. That small place called the 'Raven's Nest' is to be had, and I wish much to buy it."

"What is the cost?"

"Five thousand, and I have only a dis-

posable two thousand, unless you will allow me to draw out some of my ten thousand in the bank, and deduct the yearly interest from my partnership profits. This was the question I was anxious to put to you."

Now, it must be known, that this was a tender subject with Michael, as the express condition of his liberal present and increase of his brother's and sister's fortune was, that none of the money should be withdrawn from the firm without his consent. There was no point on which he was more tenacious than this, and Gabriel's proposition was in every way distasteful to Mr. Hammond. It must also be acknowledged that Michael's prejudices and fancies became more deeply rooted with increasing years—it was unfortunate

for him and all connected with him, that he had such absolute sway in the small circle in which he moved; his will became law in it, and he grew to consider it right and proper that it should be so.

It may be necessary, however, to observe, that Michael might have had very sufficient reason for the refusal so ungraciously given to his brother's request for withdrawing his money for the purpose he named. For, after the profits of the banking firm at Holycross had been duly divided, the junior partner's share was not very considerable, and Gabriel's receipts at the most never exceeded a thousand a year—a good income for him as a single man living in his brother's house, but nothing to justify him as a married man in launching out into any

expensive purchase of a fancy place.

But Michael's great objection was to the withdrawal of the sum mentioned from the bank at all, and he was still less disposed to concede the point when Gabriel continued,

"I trust you will kindly consent to indulge me in this respect; I am very anxious to be able to buy some small estate, as Lillian's relations naturally think I ought to do."

Here Michael stopped his brother by demanding, with a look of wrath, whom he meant by Miss Grant's relations, and whether he spoke of Lady Linwood.

"Oh! no," returned Gabriel with a smile, "Lady Linwood is far more like Lillian, and ready to bestow everything, whilst she asks for nothing in return."

"Humph!" muttered Michael in soliloquy, "I never heard of anything she had to bestow."

And his brother continued, unheeding the interruption,

"I allude to Lillian's sister, Lady Stapleton, and her uncle, Lord Carlton, who are both of opinion, and very justly so, that Lillian ought to have some place of her own as a residence, and where she might continue in case of my death. And I can quite imagine that, having heard so much of my early infirmities, and seeing how little robust I am still, they must consider my life a precarious one, and be anxious to secure my wife against such a contingency as my decease; besides this, Lillian is much younger than I am."

“Pooh!—pooh!” returned Michael, testily, “that has nothing to do with the matter. Of course, if a man chooses to marry, he is expected to make some provision for his wife, be he old or young, and likely to live or die; the only point in the question, is that the provision be suitable to the man’s means, and in conformity with what a woman has a right to expect from him.”

“I fear my means will be very inadequate to the latter consideration,” replied Gabriel.

“What! they require so much from you, or expect it, do they?” asked Michael.

“Oh! no, they are all aware my fortune is not large; and all they wish is to see part of it invested in land, and settled upon Lillian. I therefore have to request

your kind permission to withdraw the money from the bank."

"I daresay! Can you tell me why I made the proviso or condition I did with you, on doubling the amount of the fortune you were entitled to receive?"

"My dear, kind brother!" exclaimed Gabriel, with a sudden burst of grateful recollection, "I never asked, or thought of the reason; it was sufficient for me that you desired it, and I have never hitherto questioned the subject in any shape, or wished to alter that which you desired."

"No, I suppose you did not," said Michael, drily, "having no temptation to do so; but the instant it occurs, you are ready to throw me and my conditions to the winds!"

“If I thought, or could imagine,” replied Gabriel, doubtfully, “that it could make any real difference to *you*, my dear brother—but I really believed the matter of a few thousand pounds more or less in the bank could not signify to you.”

“Hear ! hear !” exclaimed Michael, wrathfully, “the way in which this young gentleman deals with thousands of pounds ! *I* can’t afford to be so liberal, I know ; and *I* consider it a matter of *great* importance to retain as much capital in the firm as I am able ; and hence the condition I made, that *all* was to remain as before I made the gift ; and as you are reaping the full benefit of it in its present form, and will do so to a much greater extent than if invested in the purchase of that tumble-down place you

mention, I refuse to sanction your proposition."

Here Michael took up the paper, adjusted his glasses, and turned from his brother and all further discussion.

Gabriel stood silent a moment, an expression of disappointment and regret shadowing his countenance; then, merely saying, "I am sorry for it, brother; but I have no doubt, judging from past experience, that you think you have good reasons for your decision," he turned and left the room.

Michael read on, or attempted to read, but no sense of what he perused penetrated to his mind; he felt irritable and angry, and yet there was no one but himself to be displeased with. No one reproached him—he had it all his own

way. It would have cost him very little to have made the brother he had brought up, and so kindly cared for, perfectly happy and contented, but an evil spirit within prevented his so doing.

Mrs. Palmer's continual droppings, and Stephen's inuendoes, had not been without effect upon his mind. However little encouragement he gave them apparently at the time, Michael had not sufficient elevation of mind to reject them, as he ought to have done.

We have said he was a good-principled and a well-meaning man, but his principles were founded on morality, without any sentiment of true religion. Thus, whilst he gave every man honestly his due, he never suspected that more might be required of him, or felt how incumbent it

was on him to beware of the evil spirit of pride and covetousness which he cherished in the secret recesses of his heart.

The love of money is an increasing evil, and the older Michael grew, the less was he disposed to part with any over which he had control; nor could he endure that others who were far less rich should be more liberally disposed than himself. He had taken up the notion originally suggested by Mrs. Palmer, that all Lillian's friends and connections were bent on getting as much of the Hammond property as possible into her possession, either at the time of her marriage or prospectively; and Mrs. Palmer would gently hint that Gabriel seemed now no longer to belong to them—that he was quite engrossed with his future wife's family—

indeed, he had long preferred them to his own; in fact, all that an envious and jealous heart in its bitterness could invent, was from time to time poured into Mr. Hammond's ears, and from them sunk down into his mind, there to seethe and rankle, and produce such fruit as might be expected.

After this discussion between the brothers, Lord Carlton, at Agnes's suggestion, made a final attempt upon Michael Hammond, endeavouring to show him the injustice of giving a man money, and yet withholding him from making such use of it as his altered circumstances might demand. The only result of the interview, however, was mutual displeasure. Michael not only obstinately refused the slightest concession in his brother's favour, but made it apparent

that he considered the marriage he was about to make as an inauspicious event for himself, and one not approved of by his family in general.

“You will excuse me, my lord,” said he, with a species of sarcastic civility, “but we Hammonds are a mercantile race, and you will no doubt consider my views very mean and narrow, but it appears to me that my brother, with his limited resources, would do better in endeavouring to save, instead of spending money. He is scarcely qualified to become a country gentleman and proprietor of an estate.”

“Really, sir,” returned Lord Carlton, “whatever your ideas may be on the subject, I only say my niece, in marrying your brother, has a right to look for a home at least.”

“Every right, no doubt, my lord. A man has no right to marry unless he can provide his wife with a home—only let that home be in accordance with his possessions and her pretensions.”

“I conceive,” said Lord Carlton, stiffly, “that Miss Grant is entitled to pretend to the best your brother can afford to give her.”

“*Can afford!*” repeated Michael, with a short unpleasant laugh. “Well, that matter is easily decided, as we know the amount of the income my brother is in receipt of; and your niece, I understand, is likely to inherit three thousand pounds from her aunt, Lady Linwood, who, in the meantime, generously allows her a hundred a year—therefore the amount of what they can *afford* is soon settled.”

Lord Carlton had too much gentleman-like reticence to show how much he was annoyed at Mr. Hammond's sneering mention of his niece's fortune, and, not wishing to provoke the wealthy banker, he merely replied—

“I believe Mr. Gabriel Hammond is your only brother?”

“Yes,” replied Michael, curtly, with a look as if to say, “and what of that?”

“Then,” said Lord Carlton, with an effort at conciliation, “I feel his cause is probably, both on the present, as well as on future occasions, safer in your hands than in mine; and that you must be as anxious for his well-being as I can possibly be for my niece's in becoming his wife.”

"I hope," returned Michael, "that I have never been wanting in the fulfilment of my duty towards my brother. I am not afraid of any investigation, the most minute, on that head. He has hitherto made his home with me. I have doubled the fortune left to him by my father, and I have received him as a junior partner in our banking-house. I merely mention these slight particulars, my lord, that you may see he can have no further *claims* upon me. With his marriage, our relations change—all will be on a different footing from that period. What the future may bring forth, is at present as little known to me as to yourself."

"It will be, at all events, in your own control," said Lord Carlton, drawn on

unconsciously to say more than he had intended.

“How so? Oh!—ah!—I see!—I suppose I understand your lordship to be alluding to my testamentary dispositions?”

“I hardly meant that,” said Lord Carlton, somewhat shocked at the banker’s bluntness.

“Perhaps,” returned Michael, “it is but natural you should, in common with other members of Miss Grant’s family, *think* of them, at all events; and that such considerations may not influence your advice to my brother in the purchase of a place, it is only fair to tell him and his friends they will have a very sandy foundation to build upon.”

“This is a discussion,” returned Lord Carlton, with dignity, “that I have no

desire to enter upon ; but as the mutual trustees to such settlements as are to be made on this occasion, I only wished to suggest the propriety of making that concession which your brother has already asked for, and which it seems you are resolved to refuse. It was far from my desire to intrude into any private family affairs, or ask impertinent questions. I only hope you will, at all events, find you have future cause to approve the choice your brother has made ; indeed, I may express my conviction that, from all I know of my niece, you will have every reason to look upon his approaching marriage as a subject of rejoicing to himself and his family."

"Oh ! no doubt," replied Michael, "I shall discover such charms in matrimony,

that I shall be induced to follow his example."

Then suddenly altering his tone to one of gravity,

"Excuse me, my lord, but you must perceive that, although my brother may in general be looked upon as the old banker's heir, there are too many chances and changes possible in this world to allow him and his friends to indulge such speculations without a risk of ultimate disappointment. I have now, I hope, made my sentiments clear to your lordship, as well as to my brother, respecting my objections to the withdrawal of his money from our banking firm. The ultimate settlement of it is, of course, in his own power, and I must refer you to his lawyer, or mine, for further arrangement, observing I have

consented to act as his trustee on the present occasion."

With this speech the conference ended. Lord Carlton was more annoyed than he chose to confess with the impracticable banker; and Michael on his part enjoyed the questionable triumph of having had his own way, and thwarted his brother's new connections.

The place on which Lillian and Gabriel had set their affections as a future home was now unattainable to them, as the "Raven's Nest" was only to be sold. They could not rent it, and so many repairs were found to be required to make it a comfortable or habitable residence, that Gabriel suggested *that* might have influenced his brother in his late refusal, and that they ought perhaps to be

thankful to instead of being displeased with him.

There was nothing near Holycross likely to suit them in the way of a habitation except this small estate, and they were very unwilling to take a house in the town itself.

It was at this crisis that Lady Linwood ventured to prefer a plea for that which she had long desired, but would not mention at an earlier period. It was a request that the young couple should make their home with her, at least for a year or two, until they should find some abode better suited to their wishes. After some little demurs on the part of Gabriel, this plan was at last acceded to; and it was settled that when Gabriel and Lillian returned from their wedding tour

they should reside at Linwood Lodge. This was not, however, agreed to, until it was fully decided that the new inmates were to be allowed to contribute their share to the household expenses. Lady Linwood insisted upon limiting this share to so trifling a sum, that Gabriel declared they should save enough out of their income in two or three years to become the purchasers of the "Raven's Nest," or any other small property that might be for sale at the expiration of that period.

The wedding-day was at length fixed, and the wedding guests invited. They were few in number, for, in accordance with Gabriel's wishes, everything on the occasion was settled to be done as quietly as possible.

However, Lady Stapleton and her husband (we mention her first, as the prin-

cipal person), promised their attendance, for Agnes had on further acquaintance taken a species of liking for her future brother-in-law. No one, in fact, could be long and familiarly associated with Gabriel Hammond without becoming in some degree attached to him.

Lady Stapleton at first softened towards him on account of his quiet gentlemanlike appearance, and a calm repose of manner that won him favour in her sight. He accompanied Lillian and her aunt occasionally on their visits to Stapleton; and there he had the further good fortune of pleasing Sir Arthur also, and they became intimate.

Gabriel's intellectual resources, which were so rarely called into play at Holy-cross House, now found a new field of development at Stapleton Park.

Lillian, who had often felt his superiority in her own mind, rejoiced in the conviction that it was recognised by others, and those more capable of estimating it than herself. Sir Arthur was slightly scientific himself, and he was charmed with a companion whose varied acquirements were equalled by his humility ; and his perfect singleness of heart, by a depth of thought and of knowledge quite beyond that of his ordinary acquaintances.

Gabriel, thus encouraged, and looked up to, became more self-relying, and consequently less a prey to the miserable feelings of diffidence and mistrust in himself, from which he had hitherto suffered so severely. This change had a most agreeable effect on his whole appearance and manner ; it was

like the sunshine shedding its warmth on some plant long hidden from its quickening influence. For the first time in his life, Gabriel felt the cheering conviction of being fully appreciated and understood. It may be supposed that his home in the old house became less and less congenial to his feelings and occupations, and as his wedding-day drew near, he was more frequently absent from the family party. He did not, however, neglect his avocations at the house on the other side of the market-place. Gabriel was now generally to be found at his post in the bank at the appointed hours; he scrupulously fulfilled his duties there, but he made no pretence of greater liking for them than heretofore.

Stephen, on the contrary, quite emulated his elder uncle in the alacrity and fervour

of his devotion to business; he had indeed shown so much indefatigable industry and perseverance, that Michael was induced to make him an allowance on his own private account. The uncle and nephew appeared to be gradually becoming more important to each other. Mrs. Palmer's plans might well have rested there, for all seemed progressing in her son's favour. She could not, however, abstain from such little remarks and observations as were calculated to widen the almost imperceptible breach that was already separating the two brothers. At the same time, she took credit to herself, and gained some from Michael, for the amiability of her demeanour towards her future sister-in-law, and the perseverance with which she made visits to, and claimed them from the ladies at the Lodge—thus

keeping that happy position in regard to them and her own family, which gave her the opportunity of remarking on, and discussing the proceedings of all within reach of her observation.

Thus, when the long-expected wedding-day did actually arrive, Mrs. Palmer was one of the earliest guests at the Lodge, asserting with sisterly interest her privilege of visiting the bride before she made her appearance below, and offering her assistance in the arrangements for the day.

The party, as we have said, was small. Two cousins of Lillian's officiated as her bridesmaids, but they were not the daughters of Lord Carlton, as neither that nobleman nor any of his family condescended to be present. Regardless, however, of that omission, Agnes and her husband were there.

Captain Linwood also ran down to join the party, and do all honour to the occasion. It was an act of generous self-sacrifice on his part, as he could not help feeling a slight degree of envy on witnessing the good fortune of his former friend and play-fellow, accompanied by a sensation of surprise at the event which brought him there. He succeeded, however, in concealing his chagrin so well, that no one had any suspicion as to the state of his mind. Lillian, on her part, was disappointed at not seeing her friend, Clara Newton, as well as Fanny, with the Holycross party. They had been invited, and promised to come; and then all their plans were disarranged by Mrs. Morris choosing to play the invalid, and refusing to leave London, or let them go without her.

One other vexation also awaited Lillian, in which no one else shared, and that was the absence of her beloved brother, so little esteemed by others, that it was rather fortunate that his regiment, having received orders for Malta, he was unable to be present at his sister's wedding. Gabriel had, however, already found the means of chasing that passing shadow from his young bride's fair brow by a promise of taking her to see Alexander before he sailed.

A few other friends were present—the Forsters, and the clergyman's family; and that completed the small party, on this happy day, who witnessed the ceremony that united Lillian Grant and Gabriel Hammond.

“Well,” said Mrs. Palmer, as she took

her place in the carriage that bore herself and son, with her remaining single brother, back to their own dwelling, "I can't say much for the wedding-party to-day. There were not twenty people present. The breakfast was nothing but a common luncheon, and the whole affair was as ordinary a proceeding as ever I wish to behold. Not very complimentary to our family, I think. It was a very different sort of party when Lady Stapleton was married. Why, half the county were invited then! There was also a much larger *déjeuner*, and everything was done in better style."

"It was quite grand enough for the occasion, I think," said Michael, shortly; "you would not expect them to make the same fuss about Gabriel as they did

about Sir Arthur Stapleton and his ten thousand a year; but it is all over happily now, and, as there are no more Miss Grants to marry, so we may hope to remain in peace for the future."

"As far as they are concerned, certainly," said Stephen, almost laughing; "but," continued he, "do you remember, sir, the last time you were there for a similar event, you said you would go to no more weddings till my uncle Gabriel's?"

"Ay, did I?" replied Michael "Well, I have kept my word, you see, and that is the more lucky as I had no intention of so doing. No," continued he in soliloquy, as he descended from the carriage and slowly crossed the hall to his own room, "I certainly did not then antici-

pate Gabriel's marriage—and from the same place, too. Well, well, he has left the old house, poor boy! God bless him, though! I hope he will be happy.”

And Michael gave a lingering glance around, as if the old familiar place had lost something that day, to the presence of which he had been long accustomed, and his cold heart softened towards his unoffending brother and his bride, and he felt more kindly disposed to them than he had done for many a long day past.

CHAPTER VIII.



STEPHEN PALMER was agreeably surprised, soon after the return of Gabriel and his wife to their home, by receiving an invitation from his uncle Michael to accompany him on a visit he proposed making to London.

“Mr. Forster is at home, and Gabriel is come back, so I don’t see why we should not take our turn at holiday-making. I want to see what the Newtons are

after, so we will just take a run up to town, if you have no objection."

Stephen was particularly gratified by this proposition, for two reasons. In the first place, he liked to be associated with, and by his uncle, in his especial plans and proceedings, and to be thus pointed out to general observation as his chosen companion; and, secondly, he also had an ardent desire to know what Clara Newton was doing and thinking about in London; he had never seen her since the day they left Holycross House, and had heard little of her proceedings since.

Mr. Hammond had a predilection for the old-fashioned hotel in Berners Street, where he had been in the habit of going ever since the days of his boyhood; and there Stephen and he took up their quarters.

It was then the month of October, and every place looked deserted. Mrs. Morris was not a fashionable lady, and therefore cared little for seasons in London, and had her own time for coming and going.

This year, however, she had returned earlier than her wont, from the excursion she generally made to the sea-side about this period of the year. Michael Hammond was aware that she was come back to town, and timed his visit accordingly.

Michael had other business to transact there, besides that of seeing his old friends; and he was a good deal engaged. But Stephen, for a wonder, took a complete holiday, and no day passed without his being seen in Wimpole Street. Mrs.

Morris gave him and his uncle a very friendly welcome; and they had *carte blanche* to appear in her house whenever they liked. It was a very pleasant time for Stephen, and his heart felt more youthful and natural after he had left the bank and all other cares and intrigues in the old house at Holycross.

Some days had elapsed after their arrival before they were introduced to their new friend, the Signor Riccardo. He had apparently by that time assumed the part of *ami de la maison*; and after his temporary absence, was generally included in all Mrs. Morris's parties, both morning and evening. There were, to be sure, very few available men just then in London—and very few, if any, with whom Mrs. Morris was sufficiently intimate to

call upon their services at a moment's notice, so the signor was frequently asked to join them. He never failed to come at the slightest shadow of an invitation, or permission given to accompany the party; though there was a certain deprecating manner and air about him, which prevented most people from thinking him either forward or intruding, when in reality he was both.

As he was always ready to be useful and agreeable, it was evident that the ladies—at least, two of them—thought he was an acquisition to their society; but a very short time had elapsed before both the uncle and nephew had arrived at a different conclusion.

Stephen's state of mind, on witnessing certain assiduities on the part of the signor

towards Clara, became so uneasy, that he could not help imparting some of his anxieties to his uncle, who forthwith sought the opportunity of asking Fanny Newton some questions concerning their new friend. He felt he was likely to have the plainest statement from her, and asked,

“Who is that Mr. Riccardo?”—Michael disdained to recognize him by his foreign appellation—“and how came he to be so intimate here? I hardly think it is a wise proceeding on Mrs. Morris’s part, considering Clara.”

“I wish,” returned Fanny, “you could persuade my cousin to see the intimacy in that light—not that I think, at present, there is any danger on Clara’s side to be apprehended. In fact, as yet, this Signor Riccardo has appeared even more

attentive to Mrs. Morris than to Clara; but—I hope I am not uncharitable—my private opinion is, he is playing a double part, and wishes to secure his footing in the family, so makes up to the aunt for the sake of the niece.”

“No doubt about it,” returned Mr. Hammond; “he is not the first adventurer who has played that sensible part, and succeeded in it, too. But he had better be informed—I daresay you can find opportunity of doing it—that if Miss Newton marries without my consent, under age, I can stop every penny of her fortune till she is five-and-twenty, and that it would be rather inconvenient, in the meantime, as she wants some years of that age.”

“Yes, she will not be twenty-one for the

next two years," said Fanny; "but I am not afraid of her at present, only it is unlucky that Mrs. Morris allows her to go out so little, and see so few people, it gives Clara so little power of choice."

"Well—well!" replied Michael, "I will speak to Mrs. Morris, and we will see what can be done for her."

Mr. Hammond took the first opportunity of finding Mrs. Morris alone to broach the subject of her questionable intimacy with the *soi-disant* Signor Riccardo.

"You seem to see a great deal of that would-be foreign gentleman, Mr. Riccardo," said he. "Do you know anything of him, or his antecedents?"

"I know quite enough of him," returned the lady, "to see he is a perfect gentleman, and very unobtrusive. He never

comes here but when he is asked, or very rarely so, and I know as much of his antecedents as I do of most of the young men I meet in London. I never thought of inquiring—it did not concern me—and I hate gossiping, and asking impertinent questions.”

“But, with such a charge as Clara, don’t you think it would be prudent to know a little more of a man you see so much of?”

“I don’t see what Clara has to do with the matter,” returned Mrs. Morris.

“Not at present, perhaps; but the fact of Mr. Riccardo’s coming here so much, looks as if he had some particular interest in doing so, so one naturally concludes it is Clara that attracts him!”

“Ah! I daresay; of course, both she

and Fanny suppose every man that comes into the house is in love with her."

"Or, at all events, attracted by the report of her fortune," said Mr. Hammond, significantly.

"People are always ready enough to think evil," replied Mrs. Morris, rather excited; "and girls are so suspicious! But I can tell you, as far as I am a judge of such matters, that the signor has no more idea of marrying Clara than you have, nor half as much as your nephew has!"

Michael, thus rebuffed, said no more on the subject. Stephen often sought an opportunity of gaining some little insight into the state of Clara Newton's heart, either as regarded himself or others, especially this Signor Riccardo; but it still remained a sealed book to him. If

Stephen fondly flattered himself one day he had made some little advance in her good opinion, the next she dashed all his hopes to the ground, and appeared equally kind to the signor or any other gentleman that might happen to fall in her way. Stephen was, in fact, tormented to know whether her conduct proceeded from coquetry and a desire of teasing him, or from real indifference.

The evening before their departure from London came at last. There was no one besides the signor and a friend of Mr. Hammond's who was asked to join the party at dinner.

"Well, this has been a very happy fortnight!" sighed Stephen, as the signor, by particular desire, was exhibiting at the piano. "How quickly it has gone! It

seems like two days, instead of two weeks !”

“I am glad you have found it so,” said Clara ; “I think London is very dull in October ; but I never find it very lively at any time.”

“I am happy to hear it,” replied Stephen, “as we shall have less difficulty in persuading you to leave it, and visit Holycross again.”

“Ah ! I should like to go there of all things—especially now Mr. Gabriel Hammond has married Lillian Grant. How I should like to see her again !”

“Oh ! do come !” exclaimed Stephen ; “you know how delighted my uncle would be to get you there.”

“Yes—thank you ; but there are two words to that—my aunt won’t let me go

anywhere without her, and she cannot tear herself away from London. I think you must include the signor in the party, if you really wish us to visit you."

"Are you in earnest, Miss Newton?—do you really wish Mr. Riccardo to be invited when you are inclined to come to Holycross?"

"Well, you would not object to asking him, would you?—you would find him very pleasant."

"There could be but one view taken of such a proceeding," said Stephen, much annoyed.

"Indeed! What might that be?" asked the young lady, indifferently, at the same time preventing reply by rising and joining the group round the piano.

Mr. Hammond made a similar attempt, and endeavoured to prevail on Mrs. Morris to fix some time for visiting Holy-cross in the course of the following year, with the two Miss Newtons.

The answer was a vague acceptation of his invitation, . but subject to so many contingencies, that it left the matter very doubtful. Still, as Mrs. Morris was a lady from whom no more could be elicited, the friends parted that night without settling the point, and early next morning Mr. Hammond and his nephew left London.

CHAPTER IX.



EARLY two years had passed away since the marriage of Gabriel and Lillian. It was a very happy union, and received its dearest blessing, when a child was born to them at the end of the first year. To Mrs. Palmer this child was anything but a welcome addition to the family party. It did, not, however, trouble her much, for she took care to see but little of her brother's boy, and had no desire that Michael should have the opportunity

of becoming interested in little Wilfred Hammond.

She reported the child as a remarkably spoilt, cross baby; and her bachelor brother naturally shrank from making advances to any intimate acquaintance with it. She found fault, also, with the name "Wilfred," that had been bestowed upon the child, for it was that of Lillian's father. Mrs. Palmer expressed her virtuous indignation that Gabriel's child should not have been named after its uncle Michael, or at least after *their* father, who, like her own, was called Stephen.

"I must say," observed the lady to Michael, "that I am surprised that Gabriel shows so little family feeling; though, that his wife should do so, is nothing new or astonishing—she makes no secret

of showing her preference for everything related to herself; but that she should induce Gabriel to do so in such a matter as naming his child, is, I think, an affront to us all, and to *you* in particular, as the head of the family."

"Well, it won't hurt me, or my feelings," replied Michael; "and I suppose it is natural for everyone to lean to their own—so we must forgive Mrs. Gabriel."

"Yes; if she had not weaned Gabriel from his own family," said Mrs. Palmer, significantly.

Notwithstanding these private remarks, the two sisters-in-law, uncongenial as they might be in every respect, kept up all the forms of outward civility. It was hardly possible to quarrel with Lillian;

and though she never could cordially like or esteem Mrs. Palmer, and even entertained a species of unacknowledged dread of her, yet she paid her every attention which their near relationship demanded; but there was no real intimacy between them. It chafed Mrs. Palmer's jealous and exacting temper to feel she was really on as distant terms with Lillian and her family as before her brother's marriage. That he was more associated with them than his own, was perhaps the natural result of living in Lady Linwood's house; and he and his wife continued to find it a most agreeable abode. They had, however, as yet, saved no money towards the contemplated purchase of a house of their own. Gabriel was, in fact, a most degenerate Hammond,

and far more inclined to spend than to lay by money. It was too delightful to him to make purchases for Lillian, not to carry this indulgence to the verge of extravagance. He idolised his sweet wife—her dress, her ornaments, her equipages, were the admiration of the town of Holy-cross.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Hammond became extremely popular; everyone liked them, and their invitations were numerous, and their acquaintance extensive. Gabriel, in his fond and devoted love for Lillian, forgot to think meanly of himself. He ceased to be shy—he even liked going into the society that so appreciated his wife, he delighted in seeing her beautifully dressed, and he insisted on no expense being spared in anything that re-

garded her pleasure or amusement. Lillian had the prettiest pony carriage, as well as the best appointed brougham, in that immediate neighbourhood; her riding-horse, too, was a marvel of beauty and gentleness. Lillian was, indeed, so tenderly indulged a wife, that Lady Linwood, with all her anxious, motherly affection, was quite satisfied, and often expressed the perfect contentment she felt in witnessing the happiness of her married life.

It may be imagined that Mrs. Palmer did not fail to call Michael's attention to the extravagance of Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel's appointments. She also gently hinted at the same in general society; but there, alas! she was met only by expressions of admiration and genuine liking for her fascinating sister-in-law, though,

no doubt, there were in that neighbourhood, like all others, some envious characters to be found, who were gratified in helping to lift the popular idol off its pedestal, and reducing it to, or below, the level of ordinary humanity.

Lillian's was not a disposition to be spoilt by all the love and admiration she received at home and abroad, she felt no self-elation in consequence, she took it all as simple kindness, and became, if possible, more amiable and charming in consequence. Whatever feeling of envy and jealousy unamiable women might entertain towards her, it was next to impossible that any man should seriously dislike Lillian Hammond.

Michael, whilst he sneered at her carriages, and listened approvingly to Mrs.

Palmer's comments on her dress, could not at the same time help liking his brother's gentle, unassuming young wife. And he was aware that, prodigal as Gabriel might be in all that tended to her comfort and enjoyment, yet he never spent more than his actual income. He was only extravagant in not laying by for a future day.

"He leaves that for others, no doubt," observed Stephen to his mother after one of their frequent discussions on all the sins of omission and commission of which Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Hammond were guilty in their eyes; "but I think they will be disappointed, for my uncle Michael is neither blind nor deaf; and, though he makes no remark on the subject, he sees their pride, and vanity, and self-in-

dulgence as plainly as we can do."

"I am not so sure on that point as you are," replied Mrs. Palmer, "for I see that Mrs. Gabriel tries to make up to him, and I know he calls her a very pleasing young woman."

"Ay, but an extravagant one, too," exclaimed Stephen, triumphantly; "he said as much to me the other day, and that he had told Gabriel what to expect when he married her."

"It is as much and more Gabriel's doings than hers," observed his mother.

"To be sure it is," replied Stephen; "but it all proceeds from her influence over him; and, as my uncle Michael says, if Gabriel had married Harriet Forster, things would have been very different. I only know, as regards myself, if ever I indulge

in such an expensive luxury as a wife, she shall be one to pay her own way, and mine too, if needs be !”

“A very wise resolution too,” said Mrs. Palmer, approvingly—“*apropos* of that, what does your uncle say about Clara Newton’s coming here by herself?”

“That she can do it this Autumn when she is of age, and not before,” said Stephen; “but don’t talk about them—I am sick of the subject.”

Stephen was indeed weary with waiting for a sight of his richly endowed love; for Mrs. Morris and the Miss Newtons had never visited Holycross since he and his uncle were in London; they seemed even to evade Mr. Hammond’s proposition of so doing. Some casualty always occurred to prevent their meeting and

Stephen fretted over his disappointment, and became more cynical in temper and disagreeable in manner to everyone except his uncle Michael.

It was the summer of 1849, a year that may be remembered by many as one of painful recollection, from the ravages made by the scourge of cholera, which swept over some districts with such devastating effects. As yet the town and neighbourhood of Holycross had been for the most part exempted from the fearful visitations of this plague. It had, however, been whispered, in fear and trembling, that, in the lower parts of the town, some few cases, bearing a strong resemblance to that terrible disease, had occurred; but at present the medical men ignored the actual presence of cholera

amongst them, and attributed the illnesses we have mentioned to other causes, and to have originated from the closeness of the atmosphere, and deficient drainage of that part of the town, where so many of the lowest and poorest of the inhabitants found their dwellings.

It was on a fine though rather sultry morning, in the month of July, that Gabriel and Lillian returned from a two days' visit they had been making at a place about twelve miles from the Lodge. It was a little past one o'clock when the carriage drove up to the door, and Lillian and Gabriel entered the house—the former observing as she did so,

“We are in excellent time, I see, and you will be able to pay baby a visit, and have luncheon before you go to the bank.”

Gabriel had, in fact, returned thus early that he might attend to business in the afternoon, being aware that his brother highly disapproved his frequent absences, especially when they occurred for two or three consecutive days.

"Yes," replied he; "we will run up stairs first, and see little Willie; but don't tire yourself, my darling, for the day is very warm, and you will have plenty of time to play with him after I am gone to the bank."

Lillian was by that time half-way up the stairs, hastening to see her boy before looking into the drawing-room. Gabriel followed his wife to the nursery, and the little treasure in it was found in high preservation by its admiring parents.

The child was a remarkably pretty, in-

teresting boy of about a year old, and quite forward enough to justify them in their frequently-expressed opinion that little Willie was a prodigy of beauty and intelligence. On the present occasion he testified the most gratifying baby delight at receiving his papa and mamma's visit after their short absence, whilst they eagerly remarked to each other on various improvements, invisible, it may be supposed, to all but parental eyes.

"I declare he is heavier," said Gabriel, when his turn came for taking the child in his arms; "and just hear how plain he says mamma; but it is papa's turn now."

"Yes!" exclaimed Lillian, who was passing a pretty white finger round the little hot gums, "and he has cut another

tooth whilst we have been away. I feel it quite plain, it has just pricked through. Haven't you felt it, nurse?"

"Yes, ma'am," [returned Mrs. Symonds; "I felt it yesterday."

But though she confirmed the important fact, she spoke with none of that exultation with which she usually announced that baby had got another tooth.

Lillian's maternal fears took alarm, and she asked in breathless haste,

"But he was not ill with it, Mrs. Symonds? He looks so well, surely there was nothing the matter with him?"

"Oh! no! pretty dear! He has been as bright and happy as a bird ever since you went away."

"And how is Lady Linwood, for we have not yet seen her?" asked Gabriel.

“Oh! her ladyship’s quite well—least-ways she was this morning, when I took baby in from his walk to see her.”

“Then what’s the matter?” continued her master, for he saw that Mrs. Symonds was by no means in her accustomed spirits.

“Oh! sir—ma’am—poor Sarah—the under-housemaid is taken very ill, and I have my fears! Indeed, though Mr. Smith would say nothing, I see he thinks a great deal.”

Gabriel, after this announcement, hastened to find Lady Linwood, leaving his wife in the nursery. Her report, however, was, like the nurse’s, but vague and unsatisfactory.

The girl had only been taken ill that

morning, and the medical man declined giving an opinion till he had seen her again in the afternoon, when he was to bring another doctor with him.

"The worst of any sort of illness at this time," said Lady Linwood, "is the terror and extreme mental prostration it induces, and that, Mr. Smith says (supposing an actual seizure of this dreaded complaint), is almost sure to prevent recovery."

"Then Smith does not consider an attack of cholera as certain to be fatal?" asked Gabriel, naturally alarmed at the idea of his wife and child being in the same house with a possible case of that disease.

"Not of necessity," replied Lady Linwood. "The symptoms of the attack

vary considerably, with different people. He has seen it in its worst form, and also occasionally of a much milder character. When you return this evening I shall, I hope, have a better report to make to you; and in the meantime I will not see Lillian, as I have been with poor Sarah."

"Do you think the complaint is infectious, then?"

"I hardly believe it to be so, myself," said Lady Linwood; "but I should like to be on the safe side, as regards Lillian and her babe. I have not seen the latter since my visit to the poor girl."

Gabriel, after this conversation, left the house with an anxious heart, and proceeded to the bank, where he found his brother already arrived, and expecting him.

After transacting nearly the usual amount of business, Gabriel asked his brother to excuse his further attendance that day, as he was anxious to get back to the Lodge; and then told him the state of affairs there, and his uneasiness of mind till he felt assured there was no cause for serious alarm.

Michael listened in silence; he was tying up some letters; he glanced at them from time to time. At last, after Gabriel had ceased speaking, he observed:

“That is what comes of Lady Linwood’s charitable actions, and running in and out of those low places down by the river-side; and I daresay she has sent that servant-girl, with all sorts of things, into the houses there; and, if she has not caught the cholera, it is plain she

has got something as bad, and, no doubt, of a very infectious nature."

Here poor Gabriel uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Well!" continued Michael, calmly, "that being the case, there is but one thing to be done. You can't go running from home just now, for there is a great press of business, and Forster is taking his summer holiday; so the only thing to be done is to go home, and send your wife and child here directly, and come as soon as you can, and take up your quarters at the old house over the way. I'll answer for there being no cholera there, and it is on the right side of the water; all the cases—and I know of some, though they try to keep them secret—have been on the other, and I have

great faith in that. So come, without delay, to the safe side."

Gabriel, without a moment's hesitation, thanked his brother for the asylum so kindly offered, and said he would not lose a moment in sending his family away from the Lodge, and availing himself, with them, of his invitation.

Gabriel, in pursuance of this intention, was hastily leaving the bank, when Michael called him back, saying:

"Pray tell Lady Linwood we have plenty of room for her also, if she will deign to come into safe quarters. I know she is a very good woman, and does not care about infection, and such things, but that is no reason why she shouldn't take care of herself."

"A thousand thanks, my dear brother;

I shall try and persuade her. You will see us all, I hope, at your house in the course of an hour or two."

CHAPTER X.



WHEN Michael returned home, and communicated the events of the day to his sister, Mrs. Palmer felt much more surprise than satisfaction at the announcement of his expected guests.

Mr. Hammond was, however, so entirely master in his own house, and maintained his privilege of inviting whom he chose into it, that his sister never for a moment thought of disputing that right, or dared

to offer the least opposition or demur in acceding to any of his plans. She therefore heard him in silence, merely asking if they were *all* coming that same afternoon.

"I told you so," replied Michael; "and it is not a great *all*, after all; for it includes only Gabriel and his wife and baby, and perhaps Lady Linwood. No such amount of preparation required, I should imagine, as you seem to intimate."

"Ah!" replied Mrs. Palmer, shaking her head ominously; "not indeed as far as *they* are concerned I hope, even if Lady Linwood comes."

"Then what's the matter?" asked Michael, impatiently; "for I see there is something behind."

"I fear there is," replied his sister;

“and that something consists of a very large number of servants.”

“Indeed!” replied he, drily; “make your mind easy on that score, for I said nothing about transporting the whole household here!”

“Ah! without that,” said Mrs. Palmer, “there will be plenty; for Mrs. Gabriel has a fine lady’s-maid, and the child has a nurse, and possibly there is a nursery-maid, and then there is a man-servant; to say nothing of Lady Linwood’s retinue.”

“Well, if that is the case, having asked them, you must find room for all.”

“Where do you wish the child to be put?” asked Mrs. Palmer, perversely determined to make as much fuss as possible,

to induce Michael to repent of his invitation to his little nephew.

“There can be little difficulty, I think, on that head; but if you are at a loss where to bestow our guests, I would advise you to give the child his father’s former rooms, for sitting and sleeping nurseries; put Gabriel and his wife in the red damask room and dressing room; and Lady Linwood can occupy the blue chamber opposite—the servants I leave to you.”

Mr. Hammond spoke with sharp decision, and Mrs. Palmer was doubly annoyed that she should have appealed to him, and thus in some degree had surrendered her own authority in disposing of her visitors as best suited her fancy and inclination. Nothing therefore remained for her to do

but order the rooms to be prepared according to her brother's directions, feeling, also, rather indignant that they were the best in the house.

That evening brought Gabriel, with his wife and child, for the first time, to stay as guests in his brother's house. Lady Linwood did not accompany them. She pleaded the serious illness of her servant, and her own fear of carrying infection, as an excuse for her absence.

Lillian looked sad as she announced her aunt's determination, and added she had not seen her since her two days' absence from home. Michael was rather inclined to sneer at her scruples, but Mrs. Palmer and her son expressed such a conviction of the propriety of her conduct, as led the others to infer that Lady Linwood

would not have been a welcome guest under present circumstances at Holycross House.

Lillian even fancied they had some doubts as to the safety of receiving any one from the infected house; and though Mrs. Palmer did not dare make open mention of her fear, she shook her head ominously when she heard that Gabriel had seen and spoken to Lady Linwood that very day.

An anxious time was now coming to Lillian, and she ceased to speculate on the selfish apprehensions entertained either by Mrs. Palmer or Stephen, as she heard of the increasing illness and subsequent death of the poor girl at the Lodge.

A few days more brought the sad tidings of another illness and its fatal termination

in the family, and after that Lady Linwood herself was attacked with the complaint.

Gabriel had to use every argument and earnest persuasion and entreaty, and finally command, with Lillian to keep her from going to her aunt. He, however, was not to be debarred from attending her himself. Gabriel was always the most unselfish of human beings, and the risk that he could not hear of for his wife, he cheerfully encountered himself, taking at the same time every precaution that the medical men considered necessary, and entirely debarring himself from seeing any of the family at Holycross House. It was soon over, but his pious care was rewarded in soothing and comforting the departing hours of one who had been through life so good a friend to him. With her dying breath she sent bless-

ings to her adopted child Lillian, only imploring her husband to keep her from coming to see her. The fearful disease dealt kindly with the poor sufferer, and she sank more from exhaustion than from the excruciating agony which so many had experienced in similar cases. She was calm, peaceful, and happy at the last moment, rejoicing in the summons which, in terminating a life of faith and active piety, called her to the reality of full enjoyment in that world where her best affections had long been placed.

The physicians at length declared that infection was more in the air than the person, and that certain localities seemed happily to be exempt from danger; so, after a short period of seclusion, Gabriel returned to his brother's house, his wife and child.

Lillian felt her aunt's death severely, but for a time her intense grief was modified and diverted by the anxiety caused by her husband's exposure to the peril of infection, at the same time thankfully appreciating the affectionate attention shown by him to her beloved aunt.

After it was all over, and Gabriel again settled at Holycross House, in unimpaired health and strength, poor Lillian began to realize the full extent of her bereavement, and bitterly indeed she mourned for one she had once regarded and loved as a mother. There were other considerations ere long that presented themselves, as the question arose in the minds of Gabriel and Lillian as to where their future residence must be. Captain Linwood came to his step-mother's funeral, but he did not

go to the infected house, which was now become his own. He expressed his intention of having it put under an entire course of purification, through the medium of painting and papering, and other alterations which he deemed to be necessary. But he wished to defer these proceedings for a few weeks, leaving the house in the meanwhile to be aired and uninhabited for a time. Gabriel thus found himself and family suddenly bereft not only of their kindest and best friend, but of their pleasant happy home, which was endeared to them both by so many fond recollections and associations.

He was not even at that time aware whether the house was likely to be let eventually, and he had not cared to make the inquiry when he had seen Henry

Linwood. Under any circumstances, he would not have thought it prudent to take Lillian and his boy back for some time; and the question arose how to dispose of himself and family till he knew Captain Linwood's decision respecting the deserted Lodge.

Michael Hammond, however, unexpectedly settled that matter for his brother; he asked him to remain at his house till his plans were settled, and Lillian's sorrow in some degree abated.

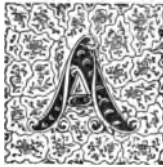
The proposition was kindly made, and gratefully accepted; but Mrs. Palmer shook her head spitefully on hearing of this arrangement, and observed to Mr. Hammond,

"It is very well for Mrs. Gabriel to make a convenience of staying here, but I

am sure she will find the old house very dull, and not at all suited to her notions for a continuance."

"Well!" replied Michael, "it will be very easy to go somewhere else when they are tired of us; in the meanwhile, I hope they will remain."

CHAPTER XI.



FEW weeks passed quietly away at Holycross House. Michael was secretly pleased to have Gabriel at home again, and he found him far more punctual and attentive to business than in the days of his courtship and early married life. So everything progressed harmoniously with the two brothers just then. Stephen looked on with an envious eye and dissatisfied heart, but made no remarks; and poor Lillian, in her dejected and depressed state

of mind, was, for the most part, guiltless of offence towards Mrs. Palmer, and appeared to find comfort in the quiet monotony of her daily life.

At length an event occurred which brought a change to all. It was a dreary sultry day in August; hot rain had been falling at intervals, with such force as to indicate there must be storms about, though at some distance from Holycross. Lillian had brought her boy into the large entrance hall, to play with, and amuse him there. Luncheon was over, and Mrs. Palmer had retreated to the morning-room, and was engrossed by her canvas-work. Stephen was at the bank—Michael and Gabriel were preparing to follow. They were both standing in the hall, with their hats on, and umbrellas

in hand, waiting for the violence of a sudden and fresh shower to abate before they attempted to cross the exposed market-place.

Lillian looked very pretty and graceful in her deep mourning dress, holding her toddling child by one finger, and rolling a large ball before him, as they traversed the wide black and white marble floor, little Wilfred screaming and crowing with delight. She was not at first aware that her husband and his brother were still there, till she saw them standing in the deep, recessed window, watching the clouds.

Now Lillian had an idea that Mr. Hammond disliked children, and Mrs. Palmer had encouraged this notion; and, in consequence, poor Willie led a very

secluded life, as regarded the public apartments. Gabriel, however, had no such misgiving, and the instant he caught sight of his wife and child, directed his brother's attention to the latter, exclaiming, as he brought him up,

"He is a nice little fellow, isn't he? Rather a better specimen of babyhood than his father!"

"Yes; he looks the picture of health," replied Michael, approaching the pair, and surveying his nephew, now for almost the first time fully displayed to his eyes. "He is twice the size you were; but you have done very well at last, notwithstanding," looking at Gabriel's tall figure and face, now glowing with pride and pleasure.

"Ah! thanks to you, brother," returned Gabriel, with grateful recollection of all he

owed to his brother's care in his ailing infancy—whilst Michael, also reverting to the same period, contrasted the appearance of the father and the child, thinking of the little brother who had then depended so entirely on himself, and loved him so well. Some such memories, no doubt, prompted the kindly impulse which induced him to stoop and take the little boy in his arms, to the infinite gratification of both father and mother. Little Willie was not shy, and he immediately turned his attention to his uncle's hat, and Michael amiably submitted to all the pulling and patting which two little fat hands thought fit to bestow upon it. Lillian, however, soon took the child away, and Gabriel, turning to the window to see if the rain was abating, called out there was a cab coming across

the market-place in their direction, and he had better hail it, and let it set them down at the opposite side, as the road was flooded with the rain. Whilst he spoke the vehicle in question came nearer, and at length drove up and stopped before the house, whilst the driver, with dripping cape and hat, proceeded to ring the bell and ply the knocker of the door.

“Who have we got here in this deluge?” said Gabriel. “Some one coming for shelter, I suppose; no one would go out deliberately to make morning visits such a day.”

As he spoke, and Michael listened for a moment, some person's face within the cab suddenly caught his eye, and uttering a brief exclamation, he hastily quitted the house, and then, without heeding the rain,

aunt more particularly disgusting to her, was that, only a week before, the gentleman had proposed to herself, and, on her refusal, entreated her secrecy on the subject, with the view, it was then but too evident, of persuading the credulous, weak old aunt to bestow herself and fortune upon him, having failed in his project of securing the more desirable and eligible young lady.

It appeared the signor had played a very double game throughout, waiting his opportunity, and deferring his proposals till the time drew near for Clara's being entitled to choose for herself on attaining her majority.

Thanks to Fanny Newton's sagacity, from the beginning Clara was on her guard as concerned herself, but perfectly

astounded when informed by Mrs. Morris of her own intentions.

It was in vain for Clara to remonstrate with her aunt, or to tell her of previous attentions and declarations paid and made by Signor Riccardo to herself, and of her having been the object of his admiration and pretended regard so recently.

Mrs. Morris only heard her with an incredulous smile, and observed—

“Ah!—no doubt you thought so. I have long seen your folly and pitied your weakness. Yes, you thought Mr. Riccardo was desperately in love with your pretty face and fortune! Now, I can tell you what the present event proves—that he never admired the one, or desired the other. Oh! the folly and forwardness of girls!—it is really incredible! No, he

must have *mind* as well as *beauty* to captivate him, and he says he has found both in me; so I hope you will have got over your disappointment by the time we return from our wedding tour, and not make yourself ridiculous by blazing it about to everybody!"

Such was the sum and substance of the bride-elect's discourse to her niece; and soon after delivering it, she set forth with her intended on some excursion relating to the wedding preparations, which were at that time in a state of great forwardness.

Clara was in a tempest of anger and indignation. She ordered her maid to pack up a few clothes and then call a cab. When it came to the door, and not before, she made Fanny acquainted with her

intentions, which she approved, only asking her to wait, and write for Mr. Hammond to fetch her the following day, and apprise Mrs. Morris of her determination before she left her home.

Clara's reply to this, was only to desire her cousin to report her proceedings, and say where she was going; and then, without hearing a word more, she set off on her journey.

After Mr. Hammond had heard her story, he said he quite approved of her coming to him—only observing, her cousin was right in wishing to send for him to escort her to Holycross; but Clara declared she could not have met her aunt again that evening, or the hateful person to whom she was about to sacrifice herself in her doting folly. She would be

of age in a month's time, and, after that, free to choose her own residence and *chaperon*.

Poor Clara was, by that time, quite knocked up with all the excitement and fatigue she had gone through, and ended with something very like an attack of hysterics; so Lillian took her into her own care and keeping, and she remained invisible for the remainder of the day of her arrival at Holycross House.

CHAPTER XII.



HERE was a strange but pleasant change visible in Stephen Palmer after Clara Newton's unexpected appearance amongst this family party. He had begun almost to despair of ever seeing her again. Thus, finding her at home when he returned that eventful August morning, caused a sudden revolution and elation in his feelings, that, for the time being, made him almost amiable and agreeable.

After a week or so had passed quietly away, and Stephen found how great an inducement it was with Clara to prolong her visit on Lillian's account, he almost forgave her and her husband, and little child, for having taken up their abode at his uncle Michael's house. All considerations appeared now to merge in that one great and all-important question—Was it possible to secure an abiding interest in Clara's affections, and to become the master of herself, and all her large possessions? It may, in truth, be added that his love, almost as much as his covetousness, prompted the inquiry.

Mrs. Palmer, too, became meekly amiable, as she watched her son's progress in his endeavours to win the heart of the heiress. Michael, also, was content, it

seemed, to let things take their course. He threw no impediment in the way of his nephew's wooing, and appeared satisfied that he should take his chance, if she was inclined to favour his pretensions.

Gabriel and Lillian were quiet lookers-on, and no doubt both formed their own surmise as to the event of the game which Stephen was playing, with every appearance of being really in earnest.

There was little interruption from the world without at this time. Lillian's recent bereavement, of course, precluded her from entering into society, and Clara's peculiar situation just then made her anxious, as far as possible, to shun observation, or any meeting with former friends. She was also so heartily ashamed of her aunt's foolish marriage, that she dreaded

any remarks being made, or questions asked, upon the subject.

Still, quiet as they all were, the appearance of Clara Newton amongst them had been a bright and happy event to them. She seemed to unite the jarring interests of the house of Holycross, and to turn their thoughts into a new and cheerful channel.

From day to day Clara looked for tidings from her newly-married aunt. She felt sure she should not be relinquished so quietly, with all the advantages that her prolonged sojourn with the Riccardos might involve. Some steps she foresaw would be taken to induce her return, or some demands made upon her purse, if she ceased to continue to reside with her aunt, according to her father's desire, until she made a home for herself.

"I am very happy with you all here," Clara observed one day to Lillian, when the post failed to bring any letter from her aunt. "I wish my aunt would forget my existence in her wedded felicity, and leave me entirely alone for the future."

"You do not intend ever returning to live with her, I suppose?" asked Lillian.

"On no account, my dear; but we must have a battle first, and I dread all the home-thrusts which I must give and take before we can arrive at an understanding or settlement of our affairs."

"Mrs. Riccardo may truly fear your remarks on her silly marriage, but you have only done what her conduct compelled, so you can have no cause for apprehension."

"Oh! you don't know what my aunt, in spite of her placid voice and manner, can

bring herself to imagine and utter, when displeased."

"I should not have thought Mrs. Morris a person of lively imagination, or much power of invention."

"No, consequently she takes refuge upon the flattest, dullest, and most odious of common-places; so, because I came here uninvited, she will declare I have a design on Stephen Palmer's heart and liberty. Nothing is too stupid, if it is but barely possible, for her to advance."

Lillian looked at Clara as she made this speech, and observed a bright colour rise in her fair face. She only quietly kissed her, and said,

"If that is all, there is no great harm done, for we all know how enchanted he would be to surrender both to your keeping."

“Don’t you think I should be very foolish to accept the charge?” asked Clara, in an altered voice, after a few moments’ pause.

“Why so?” asked Lillian, somewhat evasively.

“Ah, I am not blind to his defects, though, with all, I believe he loves me so, that I might make a very different man of him if I chose—but never mind, we will say no more about it at present.”

Lillian was also glad to drop the subject, for, truth to say, Stephen Palmer was not a favourite with her at any time; and yet as she knew no positive harm, she feared to prejudice her friend against him.

Thus Stephen went on with his wooing, and his attentions apparently were neither rejected nor accepted.

One morning, whilst the family were at

breakfast, a note was brought in. It was handed to Mr. Hammond. The contents were as follows:—

“Angel Hotel, Holycross, September 16, 1849.

“Mr. and Mrs. Riccardo present their compliments to Mr. Hammond, and, having arrived the preceding evening in this town, on their return home to London, will be glad to avail themselves of the opportunity of having an interview with him and Mrs. Riccardo’s niece and ward, and will, for that purpose, call upon them at Holycross House, at any hour most convenient to Mr. Hammond and Miss Newton.”

Clara turned very pale as she read this missive, and found that her newly-married aunt, with her husband, was so close at hand.

“Must we see them, dear sir?” she

faltered out at last, whilst Stephen left his chair to come and stand by her side, as if to shelter and protect her.

“Yes, certainly,” said Michael, who had no idea of evading an unpleasant meeting because it was disagreeable to face it. “We will let them both come and have their say out. It is right you should meet your aunt, as she will be your guardian for a month or two longer; and it is quite necessary for me to do so; and as she has chosen to marry this foreign gentleman (who, I believe, nevertheless, is an Englishman), we had better see him also, and then we shall come to an understanding without further delay. I will write and appoint twelve o’clock—it is nearly ten now.”

“I suppose,” said Mrs. Palmer to her

brother, as she lingered behind, when the others left the breakfast-room—"I suppose it will only be right and civil for me to receive Mr. and Mrs. Riccardo when they come. Although I entirely disapprove of her foolish marriage, yet, as there is nothing really wrong in it, I suppose it would only be right for me to welcome such an old friend. So they had better be shown into the drawing-room first," added Mrs. Palmer, who was dying with curiosity to see how Mrs. Morris looked as a bride, and what sort of a husband she had chosen.

"Oh! certainly," replied Michael, with a slight sneer. "Old ladies with young husbands don't come in our way every day—you are quite right to make the most of the sight; and when you have

done with it, will you, please, Mrs. Palmer, send the happy couple down here into the dining-room, that Clara and I may enjoy our turn of their pleasant society."

"Of course," replied his sister; "but perhaps you had better send for them—it will be the easiest way to end their visit."

"How, then, shall I know when you have had enough of them, and satisfied your curiosity?"

"Oh! at any time you think proper," replied Mrs. Palmer, amicably, and went her way to wait her expected guests' appearance.

Twelve o'clock soon came. It was a fine bright September morning, and it appeared that Mr. and Mrs. Riccardo walked from their

hotel to Holycross House, for the door-bell rang without any premonitory noise of carriage wheels.

The lady and gentleman were soon ushered into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Palmer sat in state to receive her former friend and her newly-acquired husband. Mrs. Riccardo entered first. Her appearance was quite bridal; she wore a very rich and rustling silk robe of a pale delicate colour—a black lace mantilla covered her ample shoulders, and the whole was surmounted by a white bonnet of some transparent material, with full-blown pink roses. She carried a pink and white lace parasol, with a deeply embroidered handkerchief in her delicately gloved hands. One of these was now extended with pleasing cordiality to Mrs.

Palmer, whilst the other gently rested on the arm of the gentleman who accompanied her, and, but for the fact of being introduced as her husband, might have passed as her son. He was also got up to the extreme of the then prevailing fashion; but, despite that, and his good looks, failed to personate the gentleman. He, however, came forward on his wife's bidding, and holding his hat tightly pressed in both hands against his chest, and placing his heels firmly together, performed a species of theatrical bow, and with an expression intended to be fascinating and agreeable, exclaimed,

“This is a most pleasant moment of my life, to be presented to a lady of whom I have heard so often and so much. Allow me to express the felicity I experience.”

Mrs. Palmer, thus addressed, smiled and bridled, and curtsied in her best manner; and the trio, having made all their speeches of ceremony, seated themselves to indulge in further and more complimentary conversation. Mrs. Riccardo exhibited none of the *mauvaise honte* which Mrs. Palmer expected would oppress her on making her first appearance with a husband in every way so unsuitable. Far, indeed, was that placid and obtuse lady from guessing the state of her quondam friend's mind. On the contrary, she looked more self-satisfied than ever, and as if she expected Mrs. Palmer might feel rather envious of her success in having secured such a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

"I daresay you were surprised to hear

of my marriage," said she, as the gentleman was employing himself in inspecting some pictures which hung round the room, "knowing, as you must have done, how I had said 'No' on all former occasions; for I had fully intended remaining as I was, thinking I could not be more comfortable—but really there was no resisting the poor signor. I held out for nearly two years before he could prevail upon me to say 'Yes;' and then I did not know what would have become of him if I hadn't had pity on him. I mention all this," continued the lady, "because of that foolish girl's conduct. She ran fairly out of the house as soon as she heard of my engagement, and all from jealous disappointment. Oh! the blindness and stupidity of some girls! and their vanity and

their conceit! Well, this has been a good lesson to Miss Clara. Now she's welcome to come back if she likes. I never bear malice, and I am sure the signor does not."

Happily for Mrs. Palmer, at that crisis of the conversation the summons came for Mr. and Mrs. Riccardo, requesting their presence in the dining-room. The reception they met with there was far less cordial than above-stairs. Clara sat in an arm-chair, and only rose when her aunt approached, to receive her frigid salute. From Mr. Riccardo she absolutely turned away, but he only noticed it with a gesture of pitying contempt to his wife. Mr. Hammond held both his hands behind his back, and forgot to remove them when he bowed to the couple. He, however,

placed chairs at the table by which he was sitting on their entrance, with paper and pen and ink before him.

He then addressed Mrs. Riccardo, who had seated herself as she was bid, with a ludicrous air of blank astonishment on her round, vacant face.

“Our business to-day is very soon settled. You are aware that the entire management of your niece’s property has been wholly and solely entrusted to me, but all the accounts will be submitted to Miss Newton, and to whoever she may select for the purpose of examining them, on the day she attains her majority. I have no doubt or fear but that the result will be satisfactory, and that she will find I have, to the best of my ability, fulfilled the trust reposed in me by her late father.

The other subject, and the one in which you are most intimately concerned, regards her residence. This was, I am well aware, appointed to be with you; but circumstances having compelled her to withdraw herself from your house, she is desirous that you should not be a loser in a pecuniary point of view for the ensuing year—I am therefore empowered to remit to you the same amount of allowance as was received by you for maintenance during her residence in Wimpole Street—expressing my regret, at the same time, that you should have rendered your niece's future abode under your roof both unpleasant and impossible.”

Mrs. Riccardo appeared unable to find words to express her tangled thoughts at this address, as her mouth opened and

shut several times, whilst she commenced various sentences, all of which were speedily relinquished, as if inadequate to convey her mighty meaning.

“Well! really, Mr. Hammond! for an old friend!” Then, after a pause, “What does she want? Girls are so full of jealousy and conceit! What’s her objection? I am sure—I declare—I say, Gustave—Signor—Mr. Riccardo—what is the meaning of all this? Why can’t she come home and live quiet and comfortable as before?”

“We need not discuss that point,” returned Mr. Hammond; “you are aware your niece is of age, or will be very soon, and is then her own mistress. Had you remained single, she would probably have still chosen to have made her home with you.”

“Indeed! she’s very condescending!” replied Mrs. Riccardo, at this intimation; “no doubt, as she wanted my husband herself.”

“Hush! hush! ma mie,” said the signor, “pray let no more be said on this unhappy subject. I see I am the victim of base prejudice and misrepresentation, but I submit to my lot. And let us take what your niece now offers—it is small compensation for wounded feelings like ours, but we submit, sir. I will take the money you offer, and sign the paper—*allons*.”

After this the affair was soon brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and Mr. and Mrs. Riccardo took their leave without any attempt at further demonstration towards Clara.

"And now, my dear," said her guardian, as the door closed upon the pair, "you look relieved at their departure. So you see the policy of getting an unpleasant thing over, that *must* be done. I have made a point all my life of facing difficulties or disagreeable business *at once*. If you shirk it or shrink from it, it becomes much more in imagination than it is in reality, and the idea of it is always tormenting you."

"I am a great coward, I know," replied Clara; "I cannot bear the idea of pain of body or mind, either for myself or others. I fear I shall never make a strong-minded woman."

"I am sorry for it, my dear, for in your position you will require some energy of character and action. You must not

give way to indolence; you are young enough to overcome it, and to become anything you desire."

"I fear not, dear sir, it is not in my nature, and I must get some clever, sensible person to manage everything for me. What a pity it is one can't be rich without having the bore and trouble of managing a large property."

"There are few advantages in this world," returned Mr. Hammond, tying up his papers, and preparing to leave the room, "without some corresponding drawback; and the possession of money is no exception to the general rule—but now you shall have no further bother from it (at least, from me) to-day."

And so saying, he left his young ward to the enjoyment of her own reflections.

A few days after this, Clara Newton was walking alone in the plantations at Holy-cross House. Deep in meditation, she had taken off her bonnet, and the sunshine glanced down on her bright hair as she passed, slowly and thoughtfully, along beneath the overhanging branches. A quick step behind caused her to look round, with a little start and blush.

"I am here," said the quiet voice of Stephen Palmer by her side.

"So soon?"

"Yes. You promised to let me speak to you, at last, in this place, and at this hour."

"Well?" replied Clara.

But although thus briefly permitted to speak, Stephen hesitated; his natural composure and self-command seemed, for once,

to desert him. He was, in fact, more deeply attached to Clara than he had been himself aware of. He felt he was about to throw for a tremendous stake, the winning or the losing of which would make or mar all his prospects in life.

Thus the young couple walked side by side for a few moments in silence. Clara at last looked up shyly and interrogatively at her companion. Then, making an effort, Stephen said :

“I have nothing new to tell you, Clara Newton ; you have long known my whole heart is yours, and the happiness of my future life is in your hands. I wish I could clothe my feelings in more persuasive words ; but they are honest and (C) true. I love you—I need not say how deeply—how enduringly. I am a plain

man, and, what is more, a poor man ; but I am a gentleman by birth and education, and had it not been for the misfortunes of others, I should at this time have stood before you in a position equal to your own, and without that sensation of presumption which oppresses me, and with which, no doubt, you charge me.”


“Oh ! indeed, Mr. Palmer, you wrong me there. I know you are my equal in every way. I never dreamt of such a feeling as you ascribe to me.”

“You acquit me, then, of presumption ?” continued Stephen, in a steadier tone ; “thank you. But I do not wish to ignore the fact—or expect you to forget it—that the gifts of fortune, and the absence of them, do make a considerable

difference in our social positions ; and I am not blind to the inference, that you are entitled to make a much higher connection. You may marry in any rank of life you desire."

"I am not ambitious," replied Clara. "I am perfectly satisfied with the sphere in which I find myself, and in which poor papa lived before me."

"Yes," returned the wily Stephen, "you are wise there, especially as you can command everything that the world can bestow, except rank, and the chances are that you might pay too dearly for its possession. Look at your friend Lillian ; you see she has chosen to place herself amongst us, when she had everything at her command ; but by her own free will she became my uncle Gabriel's



wife, nor do I think she has ever repented the day she became so."

"Oh! no; it is impossible for two people to be better suited than Lillian and Gabriel Hammond—they are the happiest people in the world."

"Clara, will you let me try and make you as happy?—will you take me for your husband?"

"Oh! really, now—this is dreadfully serious!" exclaimed Clara, trying still to evade any answer.

Stephen, however, was determined then and there to learn his fate, he therefore continued—

"Yes, indeed it is most serious, and I beseech you to trifle with me no longer. Clara, I cannot endure this state of suspense; and should you consign me to

despair, I should leave this place at once."

"What! leave the bank?" she exclaimed in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes. I do not speak unadvisedly, or merely with an intention of creating a sensation. I have considered what I should do if you determine to reject me."

"Well, at all events, let me hear your alternative," replied Clara," still playing with her victim.

"Certainly, if you care to know. My intention is to take the place of my uncle Michael's agent on his West India estates. He intends sending some one out there immediately, as he is much dissatisfied with all the accounts from thence. It would not be a bad opening for me

—I mean for a few years, in order to make myself well acquainted with all the details of management.”

“Well,” said Clara, half laughing, “I am glad you are so methodical, and will not die of disappointment.”

“Would you believe me if I told you that I should?” replied Stephen, in a depressed tone. “Let what I say to you now be a proof of my sincerity, at least. Your rejection will embitter my life. I shall, however, have to endure it, notwithstanding.”

“Well,” replied Clara, “don’t be in such a hurry with your plans, and your West Indies.”


Then, with a deep blush, she continued—

“I am of age, as you know, to-mor-

row ; and I shall also want a manager for my estates, and all that sort of thing ; and you can ask Mr. Hammond, if you like, whether he will recommend you."

The next day it was announced that Miss Clara Newton was engaged to be married to Mr. Stephen Palmer.

CHAPTER XIII.

URING the greater part of this time, so eventful to Lillian, as well as to her friend Clara, Sir Arthur and Lady Stapleton had been from home. They had taken fright on the first rumour of cholera, left the neighbourhood, and gone abroad.

As the autumn approached, Lillian hoped her sister might think of returning; but was much disappointed when Agnes wrote to tell her they had settled to go further south, and winter in Italy.

The sisters had, since Lillian's marriage, been in the habit of seeing each other more frequently than before; and at this time of sorrow and bereavement, Lillian's affectionate heart turned with increased tenderness to the thoughts of Agnes, who was the nearest and dearest of the few relatives she possessed in the world.

When Mrs. Palmer understood that Sir Arthur and Lady Stapleton intended to remain abroad, for what she termed an indefinite period, she chose to put her own construction on the information. She shook her head mysteriously, and obscurely hinted to her friends, and at last to her brother Michael, that she had no doubt they found it convenient to do so, as she had always expected to hear sooner or later of their being in embarrassed circumstances.

Every one knew Sir Arthur's income was barely ten thousand a year, and that could not be expected to do duty for fifteen or twenty, as Lady Stapleton appeared to imagine from her way of living.

Mrs. Palmer added, she understood her expenses in town and country were far beyond what her means justified, and were ruinous enough, without the addition of her husband's racing and other extravagances.

"Then," observed Mr. Hammond, "if you are so accurately informed as to their affairs, and the case is as you suppose, and they have spent too much at home, the best thing they can do is to remain abroad and retrench."

"Ah, retrench!" repeated Mrs. Palmer, with a very spiteful emphasis on the word; "I do not think that is a proceeding much

to the taste of any one bearing the name of Grant, and at home or abroad Lady Stapleton will find ways of spending money. All her family are naturally, and essentially, extravagant and self-indulgent. Why! you cannot be blind to the tendency even in Lillian, and the extreme prodigality which has marked all her proceedings since she married Gabriel. If they go on in the same way now, I see nothing but ruin before them when they set up house for themselves."

"It is to be hoped they will have learnt wisdom and economy by that time," returned Michael.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Palmer, "possibly they are not contemplating such an event; they intend, perhaps, remaining where they are."

"I think not," replied her brother, "for

Gabriel mentioned to me only this morning that he had a letter from Captain Linwood, offering to let him the Lodge if he likes to hire it."

"Indeed! and what is Gabriel going to do? I should think the Lodge will be a very expensive place for him to live in, with the gardens and pleasure-grounds. He will find it very different to living there with Lady Linwood; and Mrs. Gabriel must learn to do without so many carriages and horses."

"They are of the same opinion," said Mr. Hammond, "for I understand Gabriel is going to part with the brougham, and only keep the pony carriage for his wife."

"Humph," said Mrs. Palmer, "I wonder who suggested that, for Lillian has no more idea of management, or what is required in a family, than that baby."

“Well, she has plenty of time to learn, and you can teach her, if you are so anxious about it; but what is become of that boy of hers? I have never seen him, except once by chance, in the hall; I thought he seemed a fine little fellow.”

“Oh yes, the child is well enough, but not quite such a wonder as his mamma and the nurse appear to consider him. As for the latter, she makes as much fuss, and talks of the boy as if he were monarch of all he surveyed here!”

“Rather a circumscribed kingdom,” said Michael, with a short laugh, “for I do not think the boy sees much beyond his own nursery; at least, I never see or hear anything of him.”

“Then you are lucky,” returned Mrs. Palmer crossly, “for I hear much more

of him than is agreeable; for his rooms—those you ordered for the nursery—are just over mine, and I hear Master Wilford Hammond morning, noon, and night.”

“I am sorry you should be so disturbed,” said Michael, more amiably; “but it will not last long now. Gabriel, his wife and child, will soon be gone. Captain Linwood is coming to the Lodge to superintend his alterations there, and when they are finished, you will be relieved of the baby’s noise and its parents’ presence.”

This was welcome news to Mrs. Palmer. Yet, although she rejoiced at the prospect of the departure of her younger brother and his family, she felt considerably annoyed at the favourable impression she

could not but observe they had made during their stay upon her elder one.

Mrs. Palmer ought, however, to have enjoyed perfect contentment and happiness at this time, for Stephen, whose prosperity was her one great object in life, had ensured that, and fortune's best gifts, by one short and decisive stroke.

No opposition was made to his proposed marriage; in fact, the time for opposition was past, and Mr. Hammond seemed pleased that his late ward's choice should have fallen on his nephew, and more particularly so, as the greater part of her large fortune would remain, as before, in the bank.

Stephen, who was now become a person of prospective importance, declared his intention of retaining his situation as

one of the partners of the firm; for he said it would neither increase his happiness nor his respectability in his own opinion to retire from business. He had no wish to be indebted entirely to his wife's large fortune; he should find much more amusement and satisfaction in endeavouring to increase, perhaps even to double, the present amount of it.

Clara's ideas differed widely from her intended husband's; and when she heard his sentiments, endeavoured, with all the persuasion she was mistress of, to turn him from his project. She represented the sufficiency of that which she possessed to ensure all that could be desired by either, and declared that she should far rather enjoy her husband's society and constant companionship at home, than any benefits

which his persevering devotion to business after marriage could ensure. She even urged, playfully, that she should be far more dependent upon him for the advantage of his guidance and participation in all her employments, than he could possibly be on her for any paltry money she might possess.

Stephen was nevertheless firm in adhering to his determination of preserving his own independence, and, in fact, indulging his inherent love of gain and money-making. He, however, prompted probably by his own inclination, so far conceded to the claims she undoubtedly had at that time upon his attentions, as to devote the greater part of each day to her society. They had also an object of very engrossing and mutual interest during the early

part of their engagement, in looking out for a suitable place for their future residence in the immediate vicinity.

Clara was charmed with this employment; and Stephen, though with very different aims and objects, entered hardly less eagerly into the pleasure and spirit of the undertaking.

It so happened there was no house on any of the landed property belonging to the Newton estates fit for a gentleman's occupation. There were some very fine farms near Holycross, but they were, thanks to Mr. Hammond, very advantageously let, so there was no question at that time of building upon any of them; and Stephen inclined entirely to the purchase of some place in his own neighbourhood, whilst Clara perfectly approved and

seconded his wishes, as she declared, wherever she fixed her home, it must be within reach of Lillian's. It therefore fortunately happened that the place called Elmswell Park, within two or three miles distance from Holycross, was still to be sold.

It was a charming house, with very extensive gardens and grounds, capable of great improvement when in the hands of people of taste, with plenty of money to expend upon them.

Clara was in raptures when she went over to see and decide. The house was called furnished, but only enough so to leave room for all she might wish to do in that department, which added considerably to her pleasant anticipations.

Stephen also looked at it, and expressed his approbation, after he had carefully

gone over and inspected the estate—rather an extensive one—which was comprised in the property offered for sale. He saw at once it was an eligible investment for some of his wife's fortune, and the possession of such a place would put him in a desirable position in the neighbourhood. Therefore, after due consideration and investigation, the purchase of Elmswell Park, on the part of Miss Clara Newton, was ultimately concluded.

During the time this affair was pending, it was one of general interest and excitement, but after the amusement of selection was over, Stephen withdrew. He found so much to do in looking after the more important concerns, and attending to the business part of this and other transactions, that Clara had often occasion to

reproach her lover with being so entirely absorbed as to forget all other considerations. Sometime she would accuse him of forsaking her for his ledger.

"Which," she added, "I do believe you consider the most amusing book that ever was written."

"It is fortunate," returned Stephen, "that there is a variety of tastes amongst people, or, according to yours, everybody would like to play and none to work."

"But why will you persist in working?" asked Clara, pertinaciously.

"If I were to explain my motives," returned Stephen, "you might fail to appreciate, or even to understand them. But be assured of this, dearest, your enjoyment and happiness will always be

my first object in life. My work shall never interfere with your amusement; it will always be the delight of my life to devote the greater part of every day to you."

And with this assurance Clara was obliged to be satisfied. It is true that sometimes her mind misgave her, whether in having thus hastily accepted Stephen Palmer, she had not acted with more precipitation than prudence. Yet she certainly liked him, and to a certain degree had long entertained a prepossession in his favour. She also never doubted the sincerity of his devotion to herself, and the peculiar circumstances in which she had lately been placed had no doubt served to favour the prosecution of Stephen's suit, and bring it, sooner than might other-

wise have been the case, to a favourable termination.

The little heiress had no great strength of mind or insight into character, yet she was not wanting in quickness of perception and of feeling, with an affectionate heart that wanted some one to rely on ; and that might easily be led, under the influence of strong attachment.

Stephen had already taken a pretty accurate estimate of his future wife's character and disposition, and felt sure he should have little difficulty in bending and directing her way according to his own views and wishes, after she was securely his own.

Happily for him, she had never been spoiled by flattery or indulgence, or been

the object of much tender interest on the part of her aunt. It was, therefore, a new and pleasant phase in Clara's existence to find herself the centre of a home-circle in which she was the first object of consideration to every member of it.

Michael Hammond was especially kind and thoughtful towards his late ward in the new and delicate position she occupied in his family. He was also extremely pleased to see her under those relations, and satisfied with a choice which retained her in her original position of life, and, above all, left her money in the place where the father had amassed it, and still under his own care and superintendence. He therefore looked with double favour on the nephew who had been instrumental

to all this, and having won so great a prize, was still contented to work on, and make all his lately-acquired advantages but the stepping-stone to still greater acquisitions. He greatly admired and appreciated in Stephen a temper and disposition so congenial to his own, and termed it honourable industry and independence. What spirit is there so insatiable as that of covetousness, or one that is so successful in blinding and deceiving its votaries?

Cold and unmoved as Stephen might appear in the contemplation of his brilliant prospects, he was nevertheless secretly full of exultation and triumph. He was ever cautious in expressing his real sentiments, be they what they might, and his pretty affianced bride trusted in

him with all simple faith, which as yet believed in his devotion, and never sought to fathom the depths of his heart, or ask how large a share of it was bestowed upon her possessions.

Mrs. Palmer, too, with her constant shew of kindness and affection, came in for a large share of Clara's grateful regard, and she felt quite inclined to look upon Stephen's mother as her own.

But it was to Lillian that her heart turned with the truest affection, and from her she learnt to love her future uncle Gabriel. It was not difficult to do so; there was a peculiar charm in his open, kind nature and gentle manners, especially now they were delivered from the bondage of his former shyness and oppressive diffidence.

Thus Clara felt herself day by day happier and more at home with her future relations.

The time for her marriage was fixed to take place before the winter set in, and in the meantime she was fully occupied in directing and superintending the furnishing and embellishing of her new home; and this, and the care of arranging and forming her future establishment, served fully to engross her time and thoughts, and fill up any little corners which Stephen might chance to leave vacant.

Lillian, too, was a good deal engaged just then with her own little cares and pleasures, of a similar though humbler description to those of her friend. She and Gabriel were busy in preparing for their removal to the Lodge.

Captain Linwood was there at that time; he had taken up his temporary habitation whilst overlooking the finishing of such repairs and alterations as were to precede the coming in of the new tenants.

He was in consequence frequently at Holycross, and saw much of his former friends, Gabriel and Lillian. He had hitherto seen but little of them since their marriage, but found the latter had lost nothing of the youthful grace or winning manner he had so much admired in her girlish days.

He declared he could hardly recognize his old playmate in his new character of husband and father. The improvement these new relations had brought about in the silent, shy, and diffident Gabriel was as striking as it was agreeable.

Nor could Henry Linwood wonder at the change, when he witnessed his deep devotion to his charming wife. He found, also, that these new ties, instead of estranging Gabriel from his early friends, only served to enlarge his heart, and open it more widely and warmly to all around.

It thus came to pass that he saw much of Gabriel and his wife, who often walked over to look at and advise his proceedings at the Lodge. He was also a constant visitor at Holycross House ; for Michael Hammond had taken a fancy to, and was hospitably inclined towards, Lady Linwood's stepson, and he desired his brother to tell Captain Linwood he would always find a place at his table whenever he was inclined to occupy it.

CHAPTER XIV.



THE time passed pleasantly enough with the persons assembled in the old house at Holycross. October came, with bright sunny mornings, but rapidly shortening days, showing the summer was past and gone, and autumn drawing on. It was a favourable season for the two friends, and the occupation they were both at that period engaged in, of arranging and superintending their future homes.

They generally spent the morning at

one or other of their houses in preparation, but more frequently at Clara's, as there was so much more to be done and seen at Elmswell Park than at Lillian's smaller abode. But whilst all was going on in such apparent harmony, it happened but too frequently that there were jarring elements at work, which revealed themselves where their presence would have been least expected, and that was in the depths of Stephen Palmer's sordid spirit, which was sorely vexed and troubled at witnessing the lavish expenditure indulged in by his future wife; and whilst he was obliged to submit to the daily recurring sight, his whole heart protested against it.

Clara had, it is true, consulted Stephen, and had been guided by his wishes and

advice in the selection of their future home, though she was, at that time, *bonâ fide* the real purchaser. The place, however, being bought, and the money paid down, Stephen's influence seemed at an end.

Clara took her own way in all that concerned the internal fitting up and decorations as well as the arrangement of the new household. She consulted no one but Lillian, and evidently looked upon Elmswell Hall as her own place, and took a natural and womanly pleasure in adorning her future residence whilst it was still her own, with the best of all she could command, pleasing herself with the thought of bestowing it afterwards in its finished perfection upon him she had chosen.

Ah! how little did poor Clara Newton

suspect how grudgingly her betrothed meanwhile looked on! How he counted the cost of every unnecessary piece of expenditure, and reckoned it as so much deducted from the wealth which was so soon to be transferred into his own custody!

It happened one day that Stephen had been detained longer than usual at the bank, and when he came home to luncheon he found only his mother and uncle.

“They are all gone to Elmswell Park,” said Mrs. Palmer, replying to his inquiring look; “they went early, and are to have luncheon there. Clara heard this morning that the new furniture for the drawing-room had arrived, and she wishes me to see it, so I have promised to go, and to take you in the carriage, and we

will drive there as soon as you are at liberty to accompany me."

"I wonder when the things will have done arriving at Elmswell," replied Stephen, moodily. "I am sure the place is now more like an upholsterer's shop than a gentleman's house!"

"It is a lady's at present," said Michael, "and that explains it; but if you are going, you had better start at once. I shall not want you this afternoon, and I see the carriage is coming round."

Stephen acquiesced rather sullenly, and seated himself by his mother, but for such a prosperous man as he was now in every respect, he looked and felt strangely discomposed. With more than lover-like anxiety he had counted the

weeks that were to elapse before his marriage with Clara could possibly take place, and wearied his brain with devising expedients for shortening the time ; but his uncle Michael had insisted on every item of Clara's property being properly settled before any wedding should, with his sanction, take place.

There was also some further considerable delay occasioned in the completion of Clara's settlements, owing to the vexatious manner in which her aunt chose to act at that time.

Her signature, as one of her late guardians, was necessary to several papers, and Mrs. Riccardo, without absolutely refusing to give it, contrived to throw so many obstacles in the way, that hitherto the lawyers had been unsuccessful in their

attempts at seeing her for the purpose.

She appeared to find much gratification in thwarting her niece's matrimonial intentions, and causing inconvenience to her and her friends at Holycross, whose behaviour to herself and husband she deeply resented. She excused her own proceedings by denouncing Stephen Palmer as a fortune-hunter, and Clara's engagement to him as a family conspiracy.

Owing to this conduct, Stephen had been foiled hitherto, but only became the more impatient to secure Clara, and put a stop to her further disbursements. The equanimity of his temper was not on the present occasion improved when they arrived at Elmswell, and saw the number of packages which encumbered the hall, and the quantity of work-people about the

premises, and the confusion which appeared to reign all over the house.

Mrs. Palmer and her son proceeded at once to the drawing-room, in which lay the principal scene of action and interest that day. It was indeed at that time no bad representation of an upholsterer's shop, from the number of unarranged articles of furniture and ornament which lay scattered about.

The workmen were then engaged in hanging the window curtains, and the foreman told Mrs. Palmer he was desired to inform her and the gentleman, when they came, that they would find Miss Newton upstairs in her boudoir, and added, another lady and two gentlemen were there with her, superintending the putting up of some pictures.

Stephen's sense of proprietorship in all he saw was offended by the man's evident ignorance of his claims. So he took no notice of this information, and went about the room inspecting everything, and looking at and feeling the materials of which the curtains were made. It was a rich and beautiful pale sea-green silk, with a species of velvet flowery pattern of a darker shade, with embroidered lilies all over it. Very costly, no doubt, Stephen thought, as he stood with a piece of it in his hand.

"Very beautiful article that, sir," said the man, condescendingly, to the future master of the mansion. "Quite new, sir; we have put up none of it yet, except for Lady Stapleton, in her house in Belgrave Square."

“ Oh ! that’s it,” thought Stephen, angrily. “ This is Mrs. Gabriel’s doing, no doubt ; as if Clara wanted to be made more extravagant than she naturally is—I shall teach her a different lesson soon, I hope.”

“ Ah !” replied he to this intimation, “ and a nice price, I daresay, you will charge for it—can you tell me what each of these curtains will cost ?”

“ Can’t exactly, sir,” said the man, thinking it rather an impertinent question ; “ but if you are wishing for anything similar, no doubt you can have the estimate. Captain Linwood can recommend our house, sir ; we are putting up some chintz furniture for him at his little place close to Holycross, very neat and pretty, but quite in a different style to this—perhaps it might meet your views better, sir.”

Stephen, however, only made an indignant sort of noise, and turned away; whilst Mrs. Palmer, who had stood by listening, experienced a secret satisfaction in feeling her son was about to become the possessor of as much magnificence in his mansion as Lady Stapleton could boast of in hers. She then proceeded softly and smilingly to intimate to the foreman that the gentleman who had been speaking to him was the future master of Elmswell Park and all contained in it—a piece of information which caused the man some surprise, as he had already settled in his own mind that one of the gentlemen upstairs with Miss Newton was to be that lady's future lord.

“Well, we may as well go up now,” said Stephen, in an ungracious tone to his

mother, "and see what fresh folly they are about there."

"Never mind it," said Mrs. Palmer, in a conciliatory way. "She can very well afford it all—you need never let her furnish again. It is much better to do it handsomely when you are about it, and have such loads of money as Clara has. I am sure you are a very lucky man, Stephen; and although it is so great an expense now, it is suitable to her and to your future position in life. I confess I like to see things done accordingly. Very different to people setting up, like Gabriel and his wife, to be extravagant and get fine things when they have got next to nothing."

"They think, perhaps," replied Stephen, "it makes people give them credit for having something; but when everybody

knows you have plenty of money, where's the use of spending it all in show?"

"Oh, no use, perhaps," returned his mother, who took a womanly pride in the drawing-room appointments, "it is all matter of taste, of course."

"You won't catch my uncle Michael," replied her son, "indulging his taste and spending his money in that way."

They soon entered the boudoir, where a busy and cheerful party met their view. Clara and Lillian, assisted by Gabriel and Henry Linwood, were engaged in hanging a set of water-colour drawings around the room. They were nicely executed, and very prettily framed, and were both the work and the present of Lillian and her husband.

Clara was delighted with her friend's

contribution to her morning-room, and the merits of each drawing was eagerly discussed, as they chose out the most advantageous light in which to put them. The two ladies were occupied in adjusting the crimson silk cord by which they were to be suspended from the gilt rods, which were placed around the cornice for the purpose, whilst Gabriel and Captain Linwood, with the help of the library steps, were hanging them according to their directions.

“I am so glad you are come!” exclaimed Clara, cheerfully, as Mrs. Palmer and her son entered the room. “You are just in time to help us to place ‘The Vesper Bell.’ It is my favourite drawing of the whole collection; look at that beautiful light on the water, and the reflection of all the

people in the boat. Is it not lovely, Stephen?"

"I daresay it is," replied her lover; "but you know I have no taste for painting, or time either. I must leave all that sort of thing to my uncle Gabriel."

"Don't be severe, Stephen," replied Gabriel, laughing good-humouredly; "we all know you employ your time much more profitably and industriously than I do; but pray tell us if you approve of 'The Vesper Bell' where I am about to hang it?"

"It does there as well as anywhere else," said Stephen, not very graciously.

Somehow or other his moody manner on his entrance appeared to cast a damp over the gaiety of the little party; and as he intuitively perceived and resented it, he

walked away from them to a distant table, and turned over the variety of ornamental litter with which it was encumbered.

The pictures were at last disposed of, and Clara came to the table, and placed her hand kindly on Stephen's shoulder, asking him whether he had seen and approved of the drawing-room furniture.

"I have not seen much of it," he replied, evasively; "and there was such confusion in the room—and you know I am no judge of silks and satins."

Clara looked disappointed, but in a kind, coaxing way shewed him various trifles which were scattered about, until even Stephen's ruffled brow relaxed, and he smiled upon the sweet face that was bent over him.

Captain Linwood approached, saying abruptly,

"Well! I must be off. Good morning, Miss Newton."

"You will come and dine with us, I hope?" said Gabriel. "My brother will be very glad to see you, and so shall we all."

"Thanks very many, to you, and *all*, but I must go in another direction. I dine with the Harlands, and am engaged to stay there a day or two for some shooting, and therefore you must excuse me."

"Oh! you are going there!" said Gabriel. "Lillian had a note from Lady Harland, asking us also, but we declined."

"So much the worse for me," replied his friend; "I wish you were going."

"You will have a pleasant party there, no doubt," said Gabriel; "and I should not have minded being one of it, but Lillian goes nowhere at present, and I never care to go out without her."

"I do not wonder at that," returned Captain Linwood, looking at Lillian, and was about to leave the room, when Clara called to him.

"Oh! please, Captain Linwood, do not forget to ask Lady Harland about my fountain?"

"I shall be sure to remember it," he replied; "and I will make a sketch of it for you, and if you approve, will write to Naples for you as soon as I return."

"That will be charming!" said Clara. And then turning to Stephen in explana-

tion, she continued, "we have been making such a delightful plan of a flower-garden; and I am to have a fountain in the middle of it, just within view of this window. See!" running to the window, where Stephen very unwillingly followed, and stood by his betrothed, whilst Captain Linwood also drew near, and gazed in the same direction, "will it not be pretty, with the basin and fountain, and they can be so easily supplied from the lake yonder?"

"As there is such a large piece of water within sight of the house," replied Stephen, "I do not see why you should wish for more—it will surely be attended with a great deal of expense and trouble."

"Oh! never mind the expense!" laughed

Clara—"that is my affair; and it will afford charming occupation to all the poor people who may be out of work through the winter—they can all dig, and help, and do anything that may be wanted."

Stephen looked very little pleased with her project; but not daring to object more openly, he asked where the proposed garden was to be.

"There," said Clara, "just beyond the present one. All those fences must come down, and no end of alterations. But it will bring it just in a line with that belt of fir-trees, and they will make such a pretty background. That is the place, is it not?" she added, looking round at Captain Linwood, who was thus proclaimed to be the guilty instigator of this ruinous proceeding.

"Yes," said he, unmoved by Stephen's moody looks, which he perfectly understood, and attributed to the right cause; "let me see—yes, that is just the place we settled, beginning at that large acacia-tree. But really, Miss Newton, we must get rid of that clump of young oaks, they will be quite out of place in your flower-garden. We must have them down."

"Indeed, you must not!—you will do no such thing!" interposed Stephen, hurriedly; "you forget, my good sir, that those are all fine young trees, and growing into money every day. I would not have them touched upon any consideration."

"Then I must leave you to select another site for Miss Newton's garden," returned Captain Linwood, with a slight

shrug of the shoulders, and a passing glance of compassion at Clara; "but it is getting late, and I must wish you good morning;" and shaking hands with her, he left the room.

Gabriel and Lillian accompanied him downstairs to the hall-door, where his horse was waiting.

Mrs. Palmer meanwhile had betaken herself to another part of the house, and was rambling about, indulging in investigations up and down the solitary places of it, with much profit and satisfaction to herself.

Thus it happened the betrothed pair were left alone; but there was no satisfaction depicted on the countenance of either when they became aware of the circumstance.

Clara continued to gaze absently from the window, whilst she played with the tassel of the window-blind, tossing it from hand to hand, with a slightly impatient movement, her colour at the time being deeper than usual; but she did not speak.

Stephen also looked from the same window, but apparently took little pleasure in the fair prospect. He was probably calculating the amount of loss in the timber if Clara should insist upon felling the trees before she and they became his lawful property.

At last he became conscious of her ominous silence—the recollection of his incautious speech rushed into his mind, with a dim feeling of alarm at having affronted her by his premature assumption of authority.

Horror-struck at such a supposition, he gently possessed himself of one of her hands, at the same time calling her gently by name.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Clara, coldly, and trying to withdraw her hand.

"To ask you to forgive me, dearest, if I have offended. I know I am a plain, blunt man, I understand but little of the things that please and interest you and your friends. I entreat you to pardon me—you shall teach me what to like and care for—your likings shall be mine henceforth—your sweet will, my law!"

"No—no," returned Clara. "You know it is not that; but why must you talk so much of money, and speak to me so before strangers?"

"A stranger, indeed!" returned Stephen, with a low, short laugh. "Captain Linwood considers himself no stranger here. He usurps the privilege of directing your plans, and giving orders I should never take the liberty of doing."

"At all events, you took the liberty of counter-ordering them," said Clara.

"Indeed you mistake me, dearest; surely it was no great crime in me to presume to offer an opinion on the imprudence of felling such an ornamental group of oaks, as proposed by Captain Linwood. *I* who stand in such a relation as I do to you, and entertain the proud hope of hereafter calling you mine! Is it to be wondered at that I am distressed when I see the suggestions of others preferred, their advice

followed, and mine received, as now, with coldness and contempt?"

"Well, let us say no more about it," said Clara, in a dejected tone.

Something still jarred painfully on her feelings, but she was too kind-hearted to confess to Stephen all that was passing there.

He took advantage of her relenting mood, and pursued his victory, until he felt assured he had won back her good opinion and entire forgiveness. He pleaded his love, his poverty, which rendered him too sensitive, his early misfortunes, his anxiety to retrieve them, his consciousness of upright intentions, and last of all, his fear of being unworthy of such perfection as herself.

Stephen, it must be confessed, spoke

well; and when neither temper nor avarice was in the ascendancy, could win his way with surprising success to a woman's heart.

Clara was apparently, for the time being, vanquished; and they returned in renewed harmony to Holycross.

For some time after this little episode Stephen kept a more careful watch over himself and the outward exhibition of his sentiments. Alas! they were too deeply engrained in his nature to be subdued; but their inward dominion was in general only manifested by the lover-like eagerness with which he sought to remove every obstacle, and hasten the time of his marriage with Clara.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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